IOLANTHE'S WEDDING

BY

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CHAPTER I

I TELL *you,* gentlemen, it's a rotten piece of business to be standing beside an old friend's open grave—simply disgusting.

You stand with your feet planted in the upturned earth, and twirl your moustache and look stupid, while you feel like crying the soul out of your body.

He was dead—there was no use wishing he weren't.

In him was lost the greatest genius for concocting and mixing punches, cocktails, grogs, cobblers—every sort of drink. I tell you, gentlemen, when you went walking in the country with him and he began to draw the air in through his nose in his peculiar fashion, you might be sure he had just conceived a new idea for a punch. From the mere smell of a weed

he knew the sorts of wine that had to be poured over it to bring into being a something extra fine, a something that had never before existed.

All in all he was a good fellow, and in the many years we sat opposite each other, evening after evening, when he came to me at Ilgenstein, or I rode over to him at Döbeln, the time never dragged.

If only it hadn't been for his eternal marriage schemes. That was his weak side. I mean as far as I was concerned. As for himself—"Good Lord," he'd say, "I'm just waiting for that vile water to creep up to my heart, then I'll slide off into the next world."

And now it had come to that. He had slid off. He lay there in his black coffin, and I felt like tapping on the lid and saying:

"Pütz, don't play this dirty trick on me. Come out. Why, what's going to become of our piquet to-day?"

Nothing to laugh at, gentlemen. Habit is the most violent of all passions, and the number of persons that are ruined every year by

having their habits interfered with are never sung in song or epic, to quote my old friend Uhland.

Such weather! I wouldn't send a dog out in such weather. It rained and hailed and blew all at the same time. Some of the gentlemen wore mackintoshes, and the water ran down the folds in rivulets. And it ran down their cheeks and into their beards—perhaps a few tears, too—because he left no enemies behind. Not he.

There was only one chief mourner—what the world calls chief mourner—his son, a dragoon of the Guards in Berlin. Lothar was his name. He had come from Berlin on the day of his father's death, and he behaved like a good son, kissed his father's hands, cried a good deal, thanked me gratefully, and did a dreadful lot of ordering around—a lieutenant, you know—when all of a sudden—well, I was there—and we had arranged everything.

As I looked out of the corner of my eyes at the handsome fellow standing there manfully choking down his tears, I thought of what my

old friend had said to me the day before he died.

"Hanckel," he had said, "take pity on me in my grave. Don't forsake my boy."

As I said, that is what occurred to me, and when the pastor beckoned to me to come throw the three handfuls of earth in the grave, I silently sent a vow along with them, "I will not forsake him, old fellow, Amen."

Everything comes to an end. The grave-diggers had made a sort of mound of the mud, and laid the wreaths on top, since there were no women at the funeral. The neighbours took leave, and the only ones that remained were the pastor, Lothar and myself.

The boy stood like a block of stone, staring at the mound as if to dig it up again with his eyes, and the wind blew the collar of his riding coat about his ears.

The pastor tapped him gently on his shoulder and said:

"Baron, will you allow an old man one word more——"

But I beckoned to him to step aside.

"Just go home, little minister," I said, "and get your wife to give you a glass of good hot punch. I fancy it's a bit draughty in that silk vestment of yours."

"Hee, hee!" he said, and grinned slily. "It looks as if it were, but I wear my overcoat underneath."

"Never mind," I said. "Go home. I'll look out for the boy. I know better than you where the shoes pinches *him.*"

So then he left us alone.

"Well, my boy," I said, "you can't bring him back to life again. Come home, and if you want, I'll sleep at your house to-night."

"Never mind, uncle," he said. That's what he called me because they had once nicknamed me uncle in a joke. His face was hard and sullen, as if to say, "Why do you bother me in my grief?"

"But maybe we can talk over business?" I asked.

He had nothing to say to that.

You know what an empty house is like after a funeral, gentlemen. When you come back

from the cemetery, the smell of the coffin still clings, and the smell of fading flowers.

Ghastly!

My sister, to be sure, who kept house for me then—the dear good soul has been dead, too, these many years—had had things put into some sort of order, the bier removed, and so on. But not much could be done in such a hurry.

I gave orders for her to be driven home, fetched a bottle of Pütz's best port, and sat down opposite Lothar, who had taken a place on the sofa and was poking at the sole of his shoe with the point of his sword.

As I said, he was a superb fellow, tall, stalwart, just what a dragoon should be—thick moustache, heavy eyebrows, and eyes like two wheels of fire. A fine head, but his forehead a bit wild and low, because his hair grew down on it. But that sort of thing suits young people. He had the dash characteristic of the Guards, to which we all once so ardently aspired. Neither the Tilsit nor the Allenstein

Dragoons could come up to it. The devil knows what the secret of it is.

We clinked glasses—to my old friend's memory, of course—and I asked him:

"Well, what next?"

"Do *I* know?" he muttered between his teeth, and glared at me desperately with his burning eyes.

So that was the state of affairs.

My old friend's circumstances had never been brilliant. Added to that his love for everything in the shape of drink. Well—and you know where there's a swamp, the frogs will jump in—especially the boy, who had been going it for years, as if the stones at Döbeln were nuggets of gold.

"The debts are mounting?" I asked.

"Sky high, uncle," he said.

"Pretty bad juncture for you," I said. "Mortgages, first, second, third—way over the value of the property, and a lot of rebuilding required, and there's nothing to be earned from farming on the estate. The very chickens know that."

"Then good-bye to the army?" he asked, and looked me full in the face, as if expecting to hear sentence pronounced by the judge of a court martial.

"Unless you have a friend to pull you out of the hole."

He shook his head, fuming.

"Then, of course."

"And suppose I should have Döbeln cut up into lots, what do you think I'd realise?"

"Shame on you, boy," I said. "What! Sell the shirt from off your back, chop your bed into kindlings?"

"Uncle," he replied, "you are talking through your hat. I am dead broke."

"How much is it?" I asked.

He mentioned a sum. I'll not tell what it was because I paid it.

I laid down my terms. Firstly, immediate withdrawal from the army. Secondly, his personal management of the estate. Thirdly, the settlement of the lawsuit.

This lawsuit was against Krakow of Krako-

witz, and had been going on for years. It had been my old friend's favourite sport. Like all such things, it turned, of course, upon a question of inheritance, and had swallowed up three times as much as the whole business was worth.

Krakow was a boor, so the dispute took on a personal colour, and led to intense hate, at least on Krakow's side, because Pütz was phlegmatic and always took a slightly humorous view of the affair. But Krakow had openly declared and sworn that if any member or servant of the Pütz family set foot on his place, he would sick his dogs on him.

Well, those were my terms. And the boy agreed to them. Whether willingly or unwillingly, I did not enquire.

I made up my mind to take the first steps myself toward an understanding with Krakow, although I had every reason to believe his threat applied to me, too. I had had several tilts with him in the county council.

But I—look at me—I don't mean to boast

—I can fell a bull with this fist of mine. So a few curs don't need to make me take to my heels.

Well, then.

CHAPTER II

SO I let three days pass, gentlemen, to sleep on the matter—then my two coach-horses into the harness—my yellow trap—and heigho for Krakowitz.

Beautiful bit of property, no denying that. Somewhat run down, but full of possibilities. Lots of black fallow—might do for winter kale or something of the sort. The wheat so-so. The cattle splendid.

The courtyard! Well, you know, a courtyard is like the human heart. Once you have learned to see into it, you cannot be bamboozled so easily. There are neglected hearts, but you can see gold nuggets peeping out through the dirt. Then there are hearts all done up and polished and smartened, hearts fed up, you might say, on arsenic. They glitter and glisten, and all you can say when you look at them is "By Jingo!" Yet they are rotten and mouldy. There are hearts in the ascending

and descending scale, hearts of which the better is more hopeless than the much, much worse, because the worse improves while the other gradually declines. Well, and so on.

The Krakowitz yard was a little of all this. Bright, clean barns, miserable wagons, fine drains for the stables, but the stalls badly placed. An air of whimsicality about the whole place, with a touch of stinginess or lack of means. From appearances it is difficult to distinguish between the two. The manor-house—two stories, red brick faced with yellow stones and overgrown with ivy. In a word, not bad, something unstudied about it—well, you know what I mean.

"Is the Baron at home?"

"Yes. What name shall I give?"

"Hanckel, Baron Hanckel-Ilgenstein."

"Step in, sir."

So I walked in—everything old—old furniture, old pictures—worm-eaten, but cosy.

I heard some one begin to curse and swear in the adjoining room.

"The dirty blackguard—the impudence of

him—always *was* a friend of that Pütz, the cur!"

"Pleasant reception," I thought.

Women's voices joined in.

"Papa, papa!"

"Good Lord! All right! All right!"

Then he came in—gentlemen, if I hadn't just heard it with my own ears!—holding out his hands, his old sinner's face beaming, his dachs eyes blinking slily, but with a beam of pleasure in them.

"My dear sir, delighted."

"See here, Krakow," I said, "look out. I heard every word just now."

"What did you hear, what did you hear?"

"The epithets you bestowed on me—dirty blackguard and heaven knows what else."

"Oh that," he said, without a twitch of his lids. "I tell my wife every day that the doors are no good. But, my dear sir, you mustn't mind what I said. I always *have* been angry that you stood by Pütz. And I tell you, sir, my womenfolk mix just as good punches as he. If you had come to us—Iolanthe!—Iolanthe's

my daughter. Iolanthe!! The comfort of my soul! Doesn't hear, doesn't hear. Didn't I just say the doors are no good? But both those women are at the keyhole now! Will you get away from there, you hussies? Do you hear their skirts rustling? They're running away. Ha-ha! Those women!"

Gentlemen, who could take offence? I couldn't. Perhaps I'm too thick-skinned? But I couldn't.

What did he look like?

The creature didn't reach much above my waist-line. Round, fat, bow-legged. But that absurd body of his was topped by a regular apostle's head, either St. Peter's or perhaps St. Andrew's, or somebody's of the sort. A fine, round, broad beard, with a band of white running down from each corner of his mouth, yellow parchment skin, thick crows' feet at the corners of his eyes, the top of his head bald, but two huge grey bushes over his ears.

The fellow danced about me like wild.

Don't for a moment suppose, gentlemen, that I was taken in by his goings-on. I had known

him long enough. I saw through and through him. But—call me a simpleton if you will—I couldn't help it—I liked him. And I liked his surroundings.

There was a little corner at the window with carved oak cabinets all around—the window overgrown with ivy—very cosy. The sun shone in bright and clear as in an arbour, and on the table in an ivory bowl was a ball of worsted, and a copy of *Daheim,* and a piece of nibbled cake.

As I said, altogether comfortable and cosy.

We sat down in the corner, and a maid brought cigars.

The cigars were no good, but the smoke curled so merrily in the sunshine that I did not pay much attention to their burning away like matches.

I wanted to begin to talk about my business, but Krakow laid his hand on my shoulder and said:

"After the coffee!"

"If you please, Krakow," I said.

"After the coffee!"

I courteously enquired about his farming and pretended great interest in his innovations, about which he boasted extravagantly, though they were as old as the hills to me.

Then the Baroness came in.

A fine old piece. A slender dame. Long narrow blue eyes, silver hair under a black lace cap, a melancholy smile, fine yellow hands. A bit too dainty for a country gentlewoman, and especially for such a boor of a husband.

She welcomed me with great propriety—while the old man kept screaming as if possessed.

"Iolanthe—girl—where are you hiding? A bachelor's here—a suitor—a——"

"Krakow!" I said, completely taken aback. "Don't joke that way about an old blade like me."

And the Baroness saved me by saying very neatly:

"Don't worry, Baron. We mothers gave you up as hopeless years ago."

"But the girl can come in at any rate," screamed the old fellow.

And finally she came.

Gentlemen, take off your hats! I stood there as if somebody had knocked me on the head. A thoroughbred, gentlemen, a thoroughbred! A figure like a young queen's, her hair loose, in a thousand wavelets and ringlets, golden brown, like the mane of a Barbary steed. Her throat full, white and voluptuous. Her bosom not too high, and broad and curving at the sides. In a horse, we call it a lion's chest. And when she breathed, her whole body seemed to breathe along with her lungs, so strongly did the air pulsate through that glorious young body.

Gentlemen, you don't have to go in for breeding animals as a passionate pursuit to know how much toil and effort it costs to produce a perfect specimen, no matter of what species. And I'm not a woman connoisseur, and one doesn't have to be, to fold one's hands at the sight of so perfect a creature and pray, "O Lord, I thank Thee for allowing such a thing to walk the earth. For as long as such

bodies are created we need have no fear for our souls."

The one thing I did not quite like at first was her eyes. Too pale a blue, too languishing for such an abundance of life. They seemed to be soaring towards heaven, and yet, when they narrowed, a searching, lowering look came into them, the sort of look surly dogs get from being beaten too often.

Old Krakow caught her by both shoulders and began to brag outrageously.

"This is *my* work—this is what I brought into being—I'm the father of this," and so on.

She tried to shake him off and turned scarlet.

Aha, ashamed of him.

Then the ladies got the table ready for coffee. Fresh brown waffles, preserves after the Russian fashion, gleaming damask, knives and spoons with buckhorn handles, the fine blue smoke of charcoal puffing up from the chimney of the brass coffee machine, making everything still cosier.

We sat there drinking our coffee. Old

Krakow blustered, the Baroness smiled a fine melancholy smile, and Iolanthe made eyes at me.

Yes, gentlemen, made eyes at me. You may be at the time of life when that sort of thing happens to you none too rarely. But just you get to be well on in your forties, conscious to the very depths of your soul of your fatness and baldness, and you'll see how grateful you'll be even to a housemaid or a barmaid for taking the trouble to ogle you. And a thousand times more so if she happens to be one of the élite like this one, a creature allowed to walk this earth by God's grace.

At first I thought I hadn't seen straight, then I stuck my red hands in my pockets, then I got a fit of coughing, then I swore at myself —"You blooming idiot! you donkey!"—then I wanted to bolt, and finally I took to staring into my empty coffee cup. Like an old maid.

But when I looked up—I had to look up now and then—I always met those great, light-blue languishing eyes. They seemed to say:

"Don't you know I am an enchanted princess whom you are to set free?"

"Do you know why I gave her that crazy name?" the old man asked, grinning at her slily.

She tossed her head scornfully and stood up. She seemed to know his jokes.

"This is how it was. She was a week old. She was lying in her cradle kicking her legs—legs like little sausages. And her little buttocks, you know——"

Ye gods! I scarcely risked looking up, I was so embarrassed. The Baroness behaved as if she heard nothing, and Iolanthe left the room.

But the old man shook with laughter.

"Ha-ha—such a rosy mite—such softness, and a shape like a rose leaf. Well, when I looked at her, I said, in my young father's joy, 'That girl's going to be beautiful and bad and will kick her legs the whole of her life. She must have a very poetic name. Then she'll rise in value with the suitors.' So I looked up names in the dictionary—Thekla, Hero, Elsa, Angelica. No, they were all too soft, like

squashed plums. With a name like that she'll languish away for some briefless lawyer. Then Rosaura, Carmen, Beatrice, Wanda—nixy—too passionate—would elope with the manager of the estate. Because a person's name is his fate. Finally I found Iolanthe. Iolanthe melts so sweetly on your tongue—just the name for lovers—and yet it doesn't lead on to silly freaks. It is both tempting and dignified. It lures a man on, but inspires him with serious intentions, too. That's the way I calculated, and my calculations have turned out to be quite right so far, if in the end she doesn't remain on my hands on account of her affectation and squeamishness."

At this point Iolanthe came into the room again. Her eyes were half closed and she was smiling like a child in disgrace. I was sorry for the poor pretty creature, and to turn the conversation quickly, I began to speak about the business I had come on.

The ladies cleared the table without speaking, and the old man filled the half-charred

bowl of his pipe. He seemed inclined to listen patiently.

But scarcely did the name Pütz cross my lips when he jumped up and dashed his pipe against the stove so that the burning tobacco leaves flew about in all directions. The mere sight of his face was enough to frighten you. It turned red and blue and swelled up as if he had been seized with a stroke of apoplexy.

"Sir-r-r!" he shouted. "Is that the reason you visited me—to poison my home? Don't you know that that d—— name is not to be breathed in this house? Don't you know I curse the fellow in his grave, and curse his brood, and curse all——"

At this point he choked and was seized with a fit of coughing and had to sink down into his upholstered chair. The Baroness gave him sweetened water to drink.

I took up my hat without saying anything. Then I happened to notice Iolanthe standing there white as chalk, with her hands folded, and looking at me as if in her shame and misery

she wished to beg my pardon, or expected something like help from me.

I wanted to say good-bye at least. So I waited quietly until I felt I might assume that the old man, who was lying there groaning and panting, was in a condition to understand me. Then I said:

"Baron von Krakow, you must realise, of course, that after such an attack upon my friend and his son, whom I love as if he were my own, our relations——"

He pounded with his hands and feet as a sign to me not to go on speaking, and after trying several times to catch his breath, he finally succeeded in saying:

"That asthma—the devil take it—like a halter around your neck—snap—your throat goes shut. But what's that you're cackling about *our* relations? *Our* relations, that is, your and my relations, there never has been anything wrong with them, my dear sir. They are the best relations in the world. If I insulted that litigious fellow, the—the—noble man, I take it all back and call myself a vile cur. Only

nobody must speak to me about him. I don't want to be reminded that he has a son and heir. To me he's dead, you see—he's dead, dead, dead."

He cut the air three times with his fist, and looked at me triumphantly, as if he had dealt my friend Pütz his death-blow.

"Nevertheless, Baron——" I started to say.

"No neverthelessing here. You are my friend! You are the friend of my family—look at my womenfolk—completely smitten. Don't be ashamed, Iolanthe! Just make eyes at him, child. Do you think I don't see anything, goosie?"

She did not blush nor did she seem to be abashed, but raised her folded hands slightly. It was such a touching, helpless gesture that it completely disarmed me. So I sat down again for a few moments and spoke about indifferent matters. Then I took leave as soon as I could without provoking him again.

"Go to the door with him, Iolanthe," said the old man, "and be charming to him. He's the richest man in the district."

At that we all laughed. But walking beside me in the twilight of the hall, Iolanthe said very softly, with a sort of timid grief:

"I know you don't want to come again."

"No, I don't," I said frankly, and was about to give my reasons, when she suddenly snatched up my hand, pressed it between her slim white palms, and said, half crying:

"Oh, come again! Please, please come again."

That's the way you're taken in. Old nincompoop that I was, I went daft on the instant.

In my excitement I chewed up the whole of my cigar on the ride home, forgetting to light it.

I made right for a mirror—lit all the lights, locked the door—back to the mirror. Examined myself front and back, and, with the help of my shaving mirror, my noble profile, too.

Result—crushing. A heavy bald pate, bull's neck, puffs under my eyes, double chin, my skin a fiery russet, like a glowing copper kettle.

And what was worse than all that—when I

looked at myself in all my six feet of bulk, a chandelier went up. I knew why everybody immediately called me a "good fellow." Even in the regiment they used to call me a good fellow.

Once you are branded with a Cain's mark like that, the rest of your life turns into nothing but a series of events to prove the truth of it. People come to you with hard-luck stories, you're a butt for their jokes, they blarney you and borrow from you. If once you make a timid attempt to defend yourself, then they say, "Why I thought you were a good fellow!" So you can't get out of it. You are and you remain a good fellow. You've been stamped and sealed.

And then you, a good fellow, want to take up with women? With women, who languish for the Mephistophelean, who, to love properly, want to be deserted, duped, and generally maltreated.

"Hanckel, don't be an ass," I said to myself. "Go away from the mirror, put out the

lights, knock those silly dreams out of your head, and get into bed."

Gentlemen, I had a bed—and still have it—a perfectly ordinary bed, as narrow as a coffin, of pine, stained red—no springs, no mattress—a deerskin instead. Twice a year it is filled with fresh straw. That was the extent of my luxury. Gentlemen, there are many stories about the poor camp cots of persons in high life. You see them on exhibition in castles and historical museums, and when the visitors are herded past them, they invariably clasp their hands and dutifully exclaim:

"What power of renunciation! What Spartan simplicity!"

Buncombe, gentlemen! You can't sleep more comfortably anywhere than on a bed like that—provided, of course, that you have a good day's work *behind* you, a good conscience *within* you, and no woman *beside* you—which all amount to about the same thing.

You stretch yourself deliciously until your feet just touch the bottom of the bed, you bite the comfortable a few times, burrow in the pil-

lows, reach out for a good book lying on the table next to the bed, and groan from sheer bliss.

That's what I did that night after the tempter had left me, and as I slowly dozed off I thought:

"Well, well, no woman will make you traitor to your dear, hard, narrow bachelor's sack of straw, even if her name is Iolanthe, and even if she is the finest thoroughbred that ever galloped about on God's lovely pastures.

"Perhaps all the less so.

"Because—who knows?"

CHAPTER III

THE next day I turned in my report to the boy—leaving out my asininities, of course.

He glowered at me with his dark eyes, and said:

"Let's say no more about it. I thought so."

But a week later he returned to the subject sort of by the way.

"You ought to go there again after all, uncle."

"Are you crazy, boy?" I said, though I felt as good as if a woman's soft warm hand were tickling the nape of my neck.

"You needn't mention me," he said, examining the tips of his boots, "but if you go there several times, perhaps things will gradually right themselves."

Gentlemen, you couldn't have broken a reed more easily than my resolution.

So I drove over again. And again and again.

I would let old Krakow go on with his vapourings, and I'd drink the coffee his wife made for me, and listen devoutly while Iolanthe sang her loveliest songs, even though music—in general—well, the oftener I visited Krakowitz the uncannier the business became, but something always tugged me back again. I couldn't help myself.

The old Adam in me, before going to sleep forever, wanted a Last Supper, even if it consisted of nothing but the pleasant sensation of a woman's nearness. In the depths of my soul I had no hopes of anything beyond that.

To be sure, Iolanthe continued to cast furtive glances at me, but what they indicated—whether a reproach, a cry for help, or merely the wish to be admired—I never could make out.

Then—on my third or fourth visit—the following happened.

It was early in the afternoon—blazing hot.

From boredom or impatience I drove to Krakowitz.

"The Baron and Baroness are asleep," said the lackey, "but the young lady is on the verandah."

I began to suspect all sorts of things, and my heart started to thump. I wanted to go back home again, but when I saw her standing there, tall and snowy white in her mull dress, as if chiselled in marble, my old asininity came upon me again, stronger than ever.

"How nice of you to come, Baron," she said. "I've been frightfully bored. Let's go take a walk in the garden. There's a cool arbour where we can have a pleasant chat without being disturbed."

When she put her arm in mine, I began to tremble. I tell you, climbing a hill under fire was easier than going down those steps.

She said nothing—I said nothing. The atmosphere grew heavier. The gravel crunched under our tread, the bees buzzed about the spiræa bushes. Nothing else to be heard far or near. She clung to my arm quite confiden-

tially, and every now and then made me stop when she pulled out a weed or plucked a piece of mignonette to tickle her nose with for an instant and then throw it away.

"I wish I loved flowers," she said. "There are so many people who love flowers, or say they love them. In love affairs you can never get at the truth."

"Why not?" I asked. "Don't you think it ever happens that two human beings like each other and say so—quite simply—without design or ulterior motives?"

"Like each other—like each other," she said tauntingly. "Are you such an icicle that you translate 'love' by 'like'?"

"Unfortunately, whether I am an icicle or not no longer matters," I answered.

"You're a noble-hearted man," she said, and looked at me sidewise, a bit coquettishly. "Everything you think comes out as straight as if shot from a pistol."

"But I know how to keep quiet, too," I said.

"Oh, I feel that," she answered hastily. "I could confide everything to you, everything."

It seemed to me that she pressed my arm very gently.

"What does she want of you?" I asked myself, and I felt my heart beating in my throat.

At last we reached the arbour, an arbour of Virginia creeper, with those broad, pointed leaves which keep the sun out entirely. It's always night in arbours of Virginia creeper, you know.

She let go my arm, kneeled on the ground, and crept through a little hole on all fours. The entrance was completely overgrown, and that was the only way to get inside.

And I, Baron von Hanckel of Ilgenstein, I, a paragon of dignity, I got down on all fours, and crawled through a hole no larger than an oven door.

Yes, gentlemen, that is what the women do with us.

Inside in the cool twilight she stretched herself out on a bench in a half reclining position, and wiped her bared throat with her handkerchief. Beautiful! I tell you, she looked perfectly beautiful.

When I got up and stood in front of her breathless, panting like a bear—at forty-eight years of age, gentlemen, you don't go dancing on all fours with impunity—she burst out laughing—a short, sharp, nervous laugh.

"Just laugh at me," I said.

"If you only knew how little I felt like laughing," she said, with a bitter expression about her mouth.

Then there was silence. She stared into space with her eyebrows lifted high. Her bosom rose and fell.

"What are you thinking of?" I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Thinking—what's the good of thinking? I'm tired. I want to sleep."

"Then go to sleep."

"But you must go to sleep, too," she said.

"Very well, I'll go to sleep, too."

And I also half stretched myself out on the bench opposite her.

"But you must shut your eyes," she commanded again. I obediently shut my eyes. I saw suns and light-green wheels and sheaves

of fire the whole time—saw them the whole time. That comes from your blood being stirred up. And every now and then I'd say to myself:

"Hanckel, you're making a fool of yourself."

It was so quiet I could hear the little bugs crawling about on the leaves.

"You must see what she's doing," I said to myself, hoping to be able to admire her in her sleeping glory to my heart's content.

But when I opened my eyes the least little bit to steal a look, I saw—and, gentlemen, a shiver of fright went through me to the very tips of my toes—I saw her eyes fixed on me in a wide, wild stare, in a sort of spying frenzy, I may say.

"But, Iolanthe, dear child," I said, "why are you looking at me that way? What have I done to you?"

She jumped to her feet as if startled out of a dream, wiped her forehead and cheeks, and tried to laugh—two or three times—short, abrupt little laughs, like before—and then she

burst out crying, and cried as if her heart would break.

I jumped up and went over to her. I should have liked to put my hand on her head, too, but I lacked the courage. I asked her if something was troubling her and whether she would not confide in me, and so on.

"Oh, I'm the most miserable creature on earth," she sobbed.

"Why?"

"I want to do something—something horrible—and I haven't got the courage to."

"Well, well, what is it?"

"I can't tell you! I can't tell you!"

That was all I could get out of her, though I did my best to persuade her to confide more in me. But gradually her expression changed and grew gloomier and more set. And finally she said in a suppressed voice as if to herself:

"I want to go away—I want to run away."

"Good Lord, with whom?" I asked, completely taken aback.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"With whom? Nobody. There's nobody

here who takes up for me—not even the shepherd boy. But I must go away. I'm stifling here—I have nothing to hope for here. I shall perish. And as there's nobody to come and take me away, I'm going to go off by myself."

"But, my dear young lady," I said, "I understand you're a trifle bored at Krakowitz. It's a bit lonely—and your father kicks up a row with all the neighbours. But if you would consent to marry. A woman like you need only crook her little finger."

"Oh, nonsense! Empty words. Who would want me? Do you know anybody who wants me?"

My heart beat frightfully. I didn't mean to say it—it was madness—but there, it was out! I told her I wanted to prove to her that I for my part was not talking empty words—or something of the sort.

Because even after that I could not screw up my courage—God knows—to make love to her regularly.

She shut her eyes and heaved a deep sigh. Then she took hold of my arm and said:

"Before you leave, Baron, I want to confess something, so that you should not be under a wholly wrong impression. My father and mother are not asleep. When they heard your carriage coming up the drive, they locked themselves in their room—that is, mother did not want to, but father forced her to. Our being here together is a preconcerted plan. I was to turn your head, so that you should ask me to marry you. Ever since your first visit here both of them, both father and mother, have been tormenting me, father with threats, mother with entreaties, not to let the chance slip, because an eligible party like you would never turn up again. Baron, forgive me. I didn't want to. Even if I had loved you, oh, ever so much, that would have disgusted me with you. But now that this is off my conscience, now I am willing. If you want me, take me. I am yours."

Gentlemen, put yourself in my place. A beautiful young woman, a perfect Venus, throwing herself at me out of pride and despair, and I, a good, corpulent gentleman in the late

forties. Was it not a sort of sacrilege to snatch up and carry off a bit of good fortune like that?

"Iolanthe," I said, "Iolanthe, dear, sweet child, do you know what you are doing?"

"I know," she replied, and smiled a woebegone smile. "I am lowering myself before God, before myself and before you. I'm making myself your slave, your creature, and I am deceiving you at the same time."

"You cannot even bear me, can you?" I asked.

At that she made the same old light-blue eyes of innocence, and said very softly and sentimentally:

"You're the best, the noblest man in the world. I could love you—I could idolise you, but——"

"But?"

"Oh, it's all so hideous—so impure. Just say you don't want me—just throw me over—I don't deserve anything better."

I felt as if the earth were going round in a circle. I had to summon my last remnant of

reason not to clasp the lovely, passionate creature in my arms and hold her to my breast. And with that last remnant of reason I said:

"Far be it from me, dear child, to turn the excitement of this moment to my profit. You might regret it to-morrow when it would be too late. I will wait a week. Think it all over in that time. If by the end of the week you have not written to take back your word, I will consider the matter settled, and I will come over to ask your father and mother for your hand. But think everything over carefully, so that you don't plunge yourself into unhappiness."

She caught hold of my hand—this awful, pudgy, horny, brown hand, gentlemen—and before I could prevent her, she kissed it.

It was not till much, much later that the meaning of that kiss was to become clear to me.

Scarcely had we crawled out of the arbour when we heard the old gentleman screaming from a distance:

"Is it possible? Hanckel—my friend

Hanckel here? Why didn't you wake me up, you scurvy blackguards, you? My friend Hanckel here, and I snoring—you dogs!"

Iolanthe turned scarlet. And I, to relieve the painful situation, said:

"Never mind, I know him."

Yes, gentlemen, I knew the old fellow, but I did not know his daughter.

CHAPTER IV

SO that was the pass we had come to. On the drive home I kept repeating to myself:

"Hanckel, what a lucky dog you are! Such a treasure at your time of life! Dance for joy, shout aloud, carry on like a crazy man. The events of the day call for it."

But, gentlemen, I did not dance for joy, I did not shout aloud, I did not carry on like a crazy man. I looked over my bills and drank a glass of punch. That was the extent of my celebration.

The next day Lothar Pütz came riding up in his light-blue fatigue uniform.

"Still holding on to your commission, my boy?" I asked.

"My resignation has not yet gone into effect," he answered, looking at me grimly, but avoiding my eyes, as if I were the cause of

all his trouble. "At any rate, my leave has expired. I have to go to Berlin."

I asked if he could not get an extension. But I noticed he did not want it—was suffering with homesickness for the club. We all know what that is. Besides, he had to sell his furniture, he explained, and arrange with the creditors.

"Well, then, go, my boy," I said, and hesitated an instant whether I should confide my new joy to him. But I was afraid of the silly face I'd make while confessing, so I refrained. Another thing that kept me was a feeling stowed away deep down at the bottom of my heart—I was counting on a rejection. I feared it, and I hoped for it, too.

The feeling was something like—but what's the use of delving into feelings? The facts will tell the story.

Exactly a week later in the morning the postman brought me an envelope addressed in *her* handwriting.

At first I was dreadfully afraid. Tears sprang into my eyes. And I said to myself:

"There, old man, now you've been relegated to the scrap heap."

At the same time a peaceful renunciation came over me, and while opening the envelope I almost wished I might find in it just a plain mitten.

But what I read was:

"Dear Friend:—

I have thought the matter over, as you wished. I am confirmed in my decision. I shall expect to see you to-day when you call on my father.

Iolanthe."

Happy! Well, of course, I was happy—at such a moment—it goes without saying. But, then, how ashamed I was. Yes, gentlemen, ashamed, ashamed to face a soul. And when I thought of all the dubious, sarcastic looks that people would soon be casting at me, I felt I'd rather back out of the business.

But the hour had come. Up and be doing.

First I beautified myself. I cut my chin twice shaving. One of the stable-boys had to ride two miles to the chemist's to get me some

flesh-coloured court-plaster. My waistcoat was drawn in so tight I could scarcely breathe, and my poor old sister nearly went wild trying to give my necktie that careless, free-and-easy look I wanted.

And all the time I kept thinking and thinking—it never left me for an instant:

"Hanckel, Hanckel, you're making an ass of yourself."

But my entry into Krakowitz was grand—two dapper greys of my own breeding—silver collar trimmings—a new landau lined with wine-coloured satin. No prince in the world could have come a-wooing more proudly.

But my heart was thumping at my ribs in abject cowardice.

The old man received me at the door. He behaved as if he hadn't the faintest suspicion of what was doing.

When I asked him for a talk in private, he looked surprised and made a face, like a man scenting a "touch" from an unexpected quarter.

"You'll soon be pulling in your sails," I

thought. I naturally supposed that at the first word there would be an excellently acted emotional scene—kisses, tears of joy, and the rest of the rigmarole.

That's how vain it makes you, gentlemen, to possess a wide purse.

But the old fox knew how to drive a bargain. He knew you had to run down the prospective purchaser in order to run up the price of your goods.

After I proposed for his daughter's hand, he said, all puffed up with suddenly acquired dignity:

"I beg pardon, Baron, but who will guarantee that this alliance, which—revolve the matter as you will—has something unnatural about it—who will guarantee that it will turn out happy? Who will guarantee that two years from now my daughter won't come running back home some night, bareheaded, in her nightgown, and say, 'Father, I can't live with that old man. Let me stay here with you'?"

Gentlemen, that was tough.

"And in view of all these circumstances,"

he continued, "I am not justified as an honourable man and father in entrusting my daughter to you——"

Very well, rejected, made a fool of. I rose, since the affair seemed to me to be ended. But he hastily pressed me back into my seat.

"Or, at least, in entrusting her to you and observing the forms that I feel a man like me owes a man like you, or to express myself more clearly—by which a father endeavours to assure his daughter's future—or, to express myself still *more* clearly—the dowry——"

At that I burst out laughing.

The old sharper, the old sharper! It was the dowry he had been sneaking up to! That was what the whole comedy had been about.

When he saw me laugh, he sent his dignity and his pathos and his feeling of pride to the devil and laughed heartily along with me.

"Well, if that's the way you are, old fellow," he said, "had I known it right away——"

And with that the bargain was struck.

Then the Baroness was called in, and, to her credit be it said, she forgot her assigned

rôle and fell on my neck before her husband had had a chance, for the sake of appearances, to explain the situation.

But Iolanthe!

She appeared at the threshold pale as death, her lips tightly compressed, her eyes half shut. Without saying a word and standing there motionless as a stone, she held both hands out to me, and then allowed her parents to kiss her.

You see, that gave me food for thought again.

CHAPTER V

WHAT I had dreaded, gentlemen, did not come about.

Evidently, I had underestimated my popularity in the district. My engagement met with general favour, both among the gentry and the rest of the people. Nothing but beaming faces when they shook hands and congratulated me.

To be sure, at such a time the whole world is in a conspiracy to lure a man on still farther along the road to his fate. People are nice and amiable to you and then, just when something threatens to go wrong, they turn on you snapping and snarling.

However that may be, I gradually got rid of my feeling of shame, and behaved as if I had a right to so much youth and beauty.

My old sister's attitude was touching, even though she was the only one whom my marriage would directly injure. On my wedding

day she was to retire from Ilgenstein to be shelved at Gorowen, a family home of ours for maiden ladies and dowagers.

She shed streams of tears, tears of joy, and declared her prayers had been heard, and she was in love with Iolanthe before she had seen her.

But what would Pütz have said, Pütz who had always wanted me to marry and had never got me to?

"I'll make up to his son for it," I thought.

I wrote Lothar a long letter. I half begged his pardon for having gone a-wooing in his enemy's house and expressed the hope that in this way the old breach would be healed.

I waited a long time for his answer. When it came, just a few dry words of congratulation and a line to say he would delay his return until after the wedding day, since it would pain him to be at home on that joyous occasion and yet not be able to be with me.

That, gentlemen, piqued me. I really liked the boy, you know.

Oh, yes—and Iolanthe troubled me. Troubled me greatly, gentlemen.

She showed no real delight, you know. When I came, I found a pale, cold face. Her eyes seemed positively blurred by the dismal look in them. It was not until I had her to myself in a corner and got into a lively talk that she gradually brightened and even showed a certain childlike tenderness toward me.

But, gentlemen, I was so nice. Awfully nice, I tell you! I treated her as if she were the famous princess who could not sleep with a pea under her mattress. Every day I discovered in myself a new delicacy of feeling. I became quite proud of my delicate constitution. Only sometimes I yearned for a naughty joke or a good round curse word.

And that constantly having to be on the watch-out was a great exertion, you know. I'm a warm-hearted fellow, I'm glad to say, and I can anticipate another person's wants. Without any fuss or to-do. But I was like a blindfolded tight-rope dancer. One misstep

on the right—one misstep on the left—plop!—down he falls.

And when I came home to my great empty house, where I could shout, curse, whistle, and do, heaven knows what else, to my heart's content without insulting some one or setting some one a-shudder, a sense of comfort tickled me up and down my backbone, and I sometimes said to myself:

"Thank the Lord, you're still a free man."

But not for long. Nothing stood in the way of the wedding. It was to take place in six weeks.

My dear old Ilgenstein fell into the hands of a tyrannical horde of workmen, who turned everything topsy-turvy. If I expressed a wish, "Baron," they'd say, "that is not in good taste." Well, I let them have their way. At that time I still had slavish respect for so-called "good taste." It was not until much later that I realised that in most cases back of "good taste" there is nothing but lack of real taste.

Well, to cut it short, the bunch of them carried on so fearfully in the name of that cursed

"good taste" that finally nothing was left in my dear old castle but my hunting-room and study. Here I emphatically put my foot down on good taste.

And my narrow old cot! Nobody, of course, was allowed to touch that.

Gentlemen, that cot!

And now listen.

One day my sister, who stood in with the vile crew, came to my room—with a certain bitter-sweet, bashful smile—the kind old maids always smile when the question of how children come into the world is touched upon.

"I have something to say to you, George," she said, cleared her throat, and peered into the corners.

"Fire away."

"Has it occurred to you," she stammered, "I mean, of course—I mean—you see—you won't be able to sleep any more in that horrible straw bag of a bed of yours."

"Now, then, do let me have my comfort," I said.

"You don't understand," she lisped, get-

ting more confused. "I mean after—when—I mean after the wedding."

The devil! I had never thought of that! And I, old sinner though I was, I looked just as shamefaced as she.

"I'll have to speak to the cabinet-maker," I said.

"George," she observed with a very important air, "forgive me, but I understand more about such matters than you."

"Eh, eh," I said, and shook my finger at her. It had always been such fun for me to shock her old-maidishness.

She blushed scarlet, and said:

"I saw wonderful, perfectly wonderful bedroom furniture at my friends, Frau von Housselle and Countess Finkenstein. You *must* have your bedroom furnished the same way."

"Go ahead," I said.

I'll have to tell you, gentlemen, why I gave in so easily. I knew my father-in-law-to-be, the old miser, would not want to spend a single cent on a trousseau. So I had said I had everything. Then I had to hustle and order

whatever was needed from Berlin and Königsberg. Of course, I had forgotten about the bed.

"What would you rather have," my sister went on, "pink silk covered with plain net, or blue with Valenciennes lace? Perhaps it would be a good idea to tell the decorator who is doing the dining-room to paint a few Cupids on the ceiling."

Oh, oh, oh, gentlemen, fancy! I and Cupids!

"The bed," she continued mercilessly, "can't be made to order any more."

"What," I said, "not in six weeks?"

"Why, George! The drawings, the plans alone require a month."

I glanced sadly at my dear old bed—it hadn't needed any plans. Just six boards and four posts knocked together in one morning.

"The best thing would be," she went on, "if we wrote to Lothar and asked him to pick out the best piece he can find in the Berlin shops."

"Do whatever you want, but let me alone," I said angrily. As she was leaving the room

looking hurt, I called after her: "Be sure to impress upon the decorator to make the Cupids look like me."

That, gentlemen, will give you an idea of my bridal mood.

And the nearer the wedding day came, the uncannier I felt.

Not that I was afraid—or, rather, I was frightfully afraid—but apart from that, I felt as if I were to blame, as if some wrong were being done, as if—how shall I say?

If I had only known who was being wronged. Not Iolanthe, because it was her wish. Not myself—I was what they call the happiest mortal in the world. Lothar? Perhaps. The poor fellow had looked on me as his second father, and I was removing the ground from beneath his feet by going over bag and baggage to the enemy's camp.

So that was the way I kept the promise I had made my old friend Pütz on his deathbed.

Gentlemen, any of you who, under the pressure of circumstances, have found yourselves in the council of the wicked—that thing hap-

pens once in his life to every good man—will understand me.

I thought and thought day and night and chewed my nails bloody. As I saw no other way out of the situation, I decided to heal the breach at my own expense.

It wasn't so easy for me, because you know, gentlemen, we country squires cling to our few dollars. But what doesn't one do when one is officially a "good fellow"?

So one afternoon I went to see my father-in-law-elect, and found him in his so-called study lolling on the lounge. I put the proposition of a reconciliation to him somewhat hesitatingly—to sound him, of course. As I expected, he instantly flew into a rage, stormed, choked, turned blue, and declared he'd show me the door.

"How if Lothar sees he's wrong and gives up the case as lost?" I asked.

Gentlemen, have you ever tickled a badger? I mean a tame or a half-tame one? When he blinks at you with his sleepy little eyes, half suspicious, half pleased, and keeps on snarling

softly? That's just the way the old fellow behaved.

"He won't," he said after a while.

"But if he does?" I asked.

"Then you'll be the one to fork up for the whole business," he answered—the fox—quick as a flash.

"Should I lie?" I thought. "Ah—bah, the devil!" And I confessed.

"Nope," he said point-blank. "Won't do, my boy. I won't accept it."

"Why not?"

"On account of the children, of course. I must think of my grandchildren, in case you are magnanimous enough to present me with some. I can't bequeath anything to them, so should I rob them besides? I'll win the suit in all events, even if it lasts a few years longer. I can wait."

I set to work to try to persuade him.

"The money remains in the family," I said. "I pay it and you get it. After your death it will revert to me, of course."

"Aha! You're already counting on my

death?" he shouted, and began to rage and storm again. "Do you want me to lay myself in my grave alive, so that you can round off your estate with Krakowitz? I suppose it has been a thorn in your eyes a long time, my beautiful Krakowitz has."

There was no use struggling against such a bundle of unreason, so I determined upon force.

"This is my ultimatum, father," I said, "settlement and reconciliation with Lothar Pütz are the sole conditions upon which I enter your family. If you don't agree I shall have to ask Iolanthe to set me free."

That brought him round.

"A man can't express the least little bit of feeling to you," he said. "I think of your children, the poor unborn little mites, and you immediately think of breaking your engagement and all that sort of thing. If you insist, I won't interfere with your pleasure. I have no personal feelings against Lothar Pütz. On the contrary, I'm told he is a magnificent fellow, a smart rider, a dashing young sport.

But my dear man, I'll give you a good piece of advice. You're going to have a young girl for your wife. If she were not my own daughter and so raised above suspicion, I should suggest, 'Pick a quarrel with him, make him your enemy, insist upon payment of old loans instead of making a new one.' Nothing so sure as a sure thing, you know."

Gentlemen, until then I had taken him humorously, but from that moment on I hated him. Just let the wedding be over, then I'd shake him off.

There was still one difficult thing to do, convince Lothar that the old fellow admitted he had been wrong and had decided to give up the suit.

The coup succeeded. It surprised Lothar so little that he even forgot to thank me.

Very well, all the same to me!

I've already told you enough about Iolanthe.

The tissue of such a relation, with its attempts at intimacy and its chills, with its ebb and flow of confidence and timidity, hope and

despair, is too finely woven for my coarse hands to try to spread it out before you.

To her credit be it said, she honestly attempted to accommodate herself to me.

She tried to discover my likes and dislikes. She even tried to adapt her thoughts to mine. Unfortunately she could not find very much there. Where she in the freshness of her mind took it for granted that there were live interests, there was often nothing but land long before turned waste. That is what is so horrible about growing old. It slowly deadens one nerve after the other. As we approach the fifties, both work and rest conspire to make an end of us.

Just then red neckties were in fashion. I wore a red necktie, and also pointed boots, and silk lapels on my coat.

I presented Iolanthe with rich gifts, a pearl necklace, which cost three thousand dollars, and a famous solitaire that had come up for auction in Paris. Every day roses and orchids were shipped to her from my hothouses

—but by express, because my flowers were less valuable than my colts.

By the way, my colts, you know—but no, I didn't set out to tell about my colts.

CHAPTER VI

WELL, at this point, gentlemen, I leave a blank and pass on to the wedding day.

My father-in-law, who always landed on his feet like a cat, had decided to exploit my popularity for his own ends, and he utilised the celebration of my wedding for renewing his connection with all the people who had long been avoiding him.

He dived deep into his pocket and arranged a prodigious feast, at which, as he expressed it, champagne was to flow in rivulets along the table.

No need to tell you that the whole hullabaloo was a nuisance to me; but that's just the trouble about being a bridegroom. He is a ridiculous figure whose organs of will have been peeled out of his cranium for the time being.

On the morning of the great day I was sit-

ting in my study—very cross—the whole house stinking of paint—when the door opened and Lothar came in.

In high feather apparently—had on top boots—threw himself on my neck. Hurrah! Dear old uncle! Travelled all night to be here on time; won the prize the day before at the steeplechase; rode like the devil; didn't break his neck anyhow; drank like a fish. Still he was fresh; ready to dance like a top; brought some surprises along—very fiery kind; I was to give him twenty-five men to drill immediately—and so forth.

It came out in a stream while his black eyebrows kept jerking up and down and his eyes glowed from under them like burning coals.

"That is youth," I reflected and suppressed a sigh. I should have liked to borrow those eyes of his for twenty-four hours and everything else that went with them.

"You don't ask about my bride?" I ventured.

He laughed very loud. "Uncle, uncle, uncle! A pretty business! You marrying?

You marrying? And I sending off the sky rockets! Hurrah!"

And still laughing he ran out of the room.

I finished my cigar, much depressed. Afterwards, I thought, I would go on a round of inspection through the renovated rooms.

In front of the bedroom door my sister caught me just as she was having her luggage carried away.

"No admission here," she said. "This is to be a surprise to both of you."

Both of us?

Silly!

About eleven o'clock I started dressing. My coat cut into my shoulders. My boots pinched me on the balls of my feet. For thirty years I had been suffering from gout—a sequel to the Pütz punches. My shirt bosom stiff as a board, necktie too short, everything awful.

About two o'clock I drove to the bride's home, where the wedding was to be celebrated.

And now, gentlemen, comes a dream, or rather a nightmare, with all the sensations of

choking, of being strangled, of sinking into a pit.

And yet full of happy moments, when I thought, "Everything will be all right. You have your good heart and your fine intentions. You will spread a carpet for her to tread on. She will walk the earth like a queen and never notice her chains."

While one coach after another came rolling into the courtyard and a gallery of strange faces crowded at the windows, I ran about the garden like one possessed, spattering my new fine patent leathers with mud, and letting the tears run freely down my cheeks.

But that pleasure was cut short. They were calling out for me everywhere.

I went into the house. The old man, beside himself with glee at seeing as his guests all his old adversaries, men he had had tilts with, or had insulted, or cheated, was running from one to the other, pressing everybody's hand and swearing eternal friendship.

I wanted to say "How do you do" to a couple of friends but I was pushed with a great

halloo into a room where they said my bride was awaiting me.

There she stood.

In white silk—bridal veil like a lighted cloud around her—myrtle wreath black and spiny on her hair—like a crown of thorns.

I had to shut my eyes for a second, she was so beautiful.

Stretching her hands out toward me she said:

"Are you satisfied?" And she looked at me gently with an expression of self-surrender; and her face with the smile it wore seemed like a marble mask.

Then I was overcome with happiness and a sense of guilt. I felt like dropping down on my knees and begging to be forgiven for having dared to want her for myself. But I was ashamed to. Her mother was standing behind her and her bridesmaids and other stupid things were also there.

I mumbled something that I myself did not understand, and because I did not know what else to say, I walked up and down in front of

her and kept buttoning and unbuttoning my gloves.

My mother-in-law, who herself did not know what to say, smoothed down the folds of Iolanthe's veil and looked at me from the corner of her eye half reproachfully, half encouragingly.

At every turn I ran into a mirror, and—willy-nilly—I had to see myself—my bald forehead, my lobster-coloured cheeks with the heavy folds running into my chin, and the wart under the left corner of my mouth. I saw my collar, which was much too tight—even the widest girthed collar had not been wide enough—and I saw my grubby red neck bulging over my collar all around like a wreath.

I saw all that, and at each turn I was shaken with a mixed feeling of madness and honesty, that I ought to cry out to her, "Have pity on yourself! There is time yet. Let me go."

You must remember there were no such things as civil weddings at that time yet.

I should never have brought myself to the point of saying it even if I had kept walking to and fro for a thousand years. Neverthe-

less, when the old man came sidling in, watchful as a weasel, to say, "Come along, the pastor is waiting!" I felt injured, as though some deep-laid plan of mine had been thwarted.

I offered Iolanthe my arm. The folding doors were pulled open.

Faces! Faces! Endless masses of faces! As if glued to one another. And all of them leered at me as if to say:

"Hanckel, you are making an ass of yourself."

An avenue formed itself between them, and we walked down the avenue while I kept thinking in the deathlike silence, "Strange that nobody bursts out laughing."

So we reached the altar, which the old man had constructed with awful skill of a large packing box covered with red bunting. And quite an exhibition of flowers and candles on it, with a crucifix in the middle, as at a funeral.

The pastor was standing in front of us. He put on his solemn ministerial air and stroked back the wide sleeves of his vestment like a sleight-of-hand man about to begin his tricks.

First a hymn—five stanzas—then the sermon.

I have not the slightest idea what the pastor said, for suddenly a perverse thought entered my brain and became a fixed idea not to be shaken off.

She will say, "No!"

And the nearer we drew to the decisive moment the more the anguish of that thought throttled me. Finally I had not the least doubt in the world that she would say "No."

Gentlemen, she said "Yes."

I heaved a sigh of relief, like a criminal who has just heard the verdict "Not guilty."

And now the strangest thing of all.

Scarcely had the word crossed her lips and the fear of humiliation been lifted from my soul than I began to wish, "Oh, if only she had said 'No'."

After the Amen there were congratulations without end. I shook one hand after another with genuine fervour. "Thank you" here, "Thank you" there. I was grateful from the bottom of my heart to every fellow there

because in anticipation of the excellent food and drink to follow he bestowed his polite congratulations upon me.

Only one person was missing—Lothar.

He stood in the back row looking quite sallow, as though he were hungry or felt bored.

"There he is, Iolanthe," I said and caught hold of him. "Lothar Pütz—Pütz's only son —my own boy. Shake hands with him. Call him Lothar!" She still hesitated, so I placed her hand in his and thought to myself, "Thank God he is here. He will help us over many a difficult hour."

Please don't smile, gentlemen. You think that in the course of my married life a love relation slowly developed between the two young people. Not a bit of it.

Just a little patience. Something very different is going to come.

Well, to proceed. We went to table.

Everything according to form and in abundance. Flowers, silverware, baumkuchen.

To begin with, a little glass of sherry to warm up your stomach. The sherry was good

but the glass was small and I could not see any more sherry about.

"Now you must be very gallant and tender to her," I said to myself and looked at her sidewise. Her elbow was grazing my arm and I could feel how she was trembling.

"She's hungry," I thought, for I had not eaten a thing myself yet.

Her eyes were fixed on the candelabra in front of her. Their silvery sheen in the course of the years had faded and wrinkled like the skin of an old woman.

Her profile! God, how beautiful!

And that was to belong to me.

Nonsense!

And I tossed off a tumblerful of thin Rhine wine, which gurgled in my empty stomach like bubbles in a duck puddle.

"This is not the way to muster up tenderness," I thought, looking around longingly for the sherry.

Then I pulled myself together. "Please eat something," I said, satisfied that I had done something marvellous.

She nodded and lifted her spoon to her mouth.

After the soup came some excellent fish, Rhine salmon if I am not mistaken, and the sauce had the proper admixture of brandy, lemon juice and capers. Delicious, in short.

Then came venison. Pretty good even if a little too fresh still. Well, on this point opinions differ.

"Do eat something," I said again, pursing my lips so that people should think that what I was whispering was a compliment or something sentimental.

No, that sort of thing didn't get me any farther.

Already I had disposed of the second bottle of the thin Rhine wine and began to swell like a balloon.

I looked around for Lothar, who had inherited from his father a scent for everything drinkable, but he had been seated somewhere downstairs.

Then I was saved by a toast, which gave me a chance to stand up. On my rounds I dis-

covered a small but select company of sherry bottles which the old man had hidden behind a curtain.

I picked up two of them quickly and started to pour courage into me. It was a slow process but it succeeded. I can stand a good deal, you know, gentlemen.

After the venison came a salmi of partridges. Two successive dishes of game are not quite the right thing, but they were mighty tasty.

At just about this point something like a wall of mist loosened itself from the ceiling and descended slowly—slowly.

Now I was tossing gallantries right and left. I tell you, gentlemen, I was going it.

I called my bride "enchantress" and "charming sprite," and told a rather broad hunting story, and explained to my neighbours of what use the experiences are that a bachelor of today acquires before marrying.

To be brief, gentlemen, I was irresistible.

But the wall of mist kept sinking deeper and deeper. It was like in mountain regions, where first the highest summits disappear and

then little by little the mountain side, one ledge after another.

First the lights in the candelabra got reddish halos round them. They looked like small suns in a vapoury atmosphere with rainbow rays radiating from them. Then gradually everybody sitting behind the candelabra talking and rattling forks disappeared from sight and sound. Only at intervals did a white shirt bosom or a bit of a woman's arm gleam from the "purple darkness"—isn't that what Schiller calls it?

Oh, yes! Something else struck me.

My father-in-law was running around with two bottles of champagne, and whenever he saw an entirely empty glass, he would say, "Please do have some more. Why don't you drink?"

"You old fraud!" I said when he bobbed up back of me, and I pinched his leg, "is that what you call letting it flow in rivulets?"

You see, gentlemen, my condition was growing dangerous. And all of a sudden I felt my heart expanding. I had to talk. I simply had

to talk. So I struck my glass madly for silence.

"For heaven's sake—keep quiet!" my bride —I beg your pardon, my wife—whispered in my ear.

But even if it cost me my life I had to talk.

What I said was reported to me afterwards, and if my authorities tell the truth, it was something like the following:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am no longer young. But I do not regret that at all, for maturity also hath its joys. And if anybody were to assert that youth can be happy only when wedded to youth, I would say, 'An infamous lie! I myself am proof of the contrary. For I am no longer young, but I am going to make my young wife happy because my wife is an angel—and I have a loving heart—yea, I swear I have a loving heart, and whoever says that here underneath my waistcoat—there beats no loving heart—to him—I would like to lay bare my heart——' "

At this point, according to reports, my words were choked by tears, and in the middle

of my abject outpourings I was hustled from the room.

. . . . .

When I awoke I was lying on a couch much too short for me, with all kinds of fur collars and caps and woollen wraps thrown over me. My neck was strained, my legs numb.

I looked around.

On a console under a mirror a single candle was burning. Brushes, combs, and boxes of pins lay beside it. On the walls hung a mass of cloaks, hats and all that sort of thing.

Oho, the ladies' dressing room!

Slowly I became conscious of what had happened. I looked at the clock. Nearly two. Somewhere, as though at a great distance, the playing of a piano and the scraping and sliding of dancing feet in time with the music.

My wedding!

I combed my hair, arranged my necktie, and heartily wished I might lie right down in my lovely hard camp bed and pull the covers over my ears, instead of—brr!

Well, there was nothing to be done about

it. So I started for the reception rooms, though without any real feeling of shame, as I was still too sleepy and drowsy to comprehend the state I was in fully.

At first nobody noticed me.

In the rooms where the gentlemen were sitting the smoke was so thick that at only a few feet away all you could discern was merely the vague outlines of human bodies. A very steep game of cards was under way, and my father-in-law was relieving his guests of their money so neatly that had he had three more daughters to marry off he would have become a rich man.

He called it "making wedding expenses."

I glanced in at the room where the dancing was going on. The dowagers were fighting off sleep, the young people were hopping about mechanically, while the pianist opened his eyes only when he struck a wrong note. My sister was holding a glass of lemonade on her lap and was inspecting the lemon seeds. It was a doleful sight.

Iolanthe nowhere to be seen.

I returned to the card tables and tapped the

old man on his shoulder as he was scooping up the stake he had just won and was stuffing it into his pocket.

He turned on me savagely.

"Well, you drunkard, you!"

"Where is Iolanthe?"

"I don't know. Go find her." And he went on playing.

The other gentlemen looked embarrassed, but acted as though nothing had happened. "Won't you try your luck, young Benedict?" they clamoured.

So I made off with all haste, for I knew my weakness. Had I taken a hand, there would have been another scandal.

I sneaked around outside the dancing hall. I did not feel equal to meeting the glances of the dowagers.

In the corridor a tin kitchen lamp was smoking, from the pantries came the rattle of plates and the giggling of half-drunken kitchen maids.

Awful!

I knocked on the door of Iolanthe's room.

No answer. Knocked again. Everything quiet. So I went in.

And what did I see?

My mother-in-law sitting on the edge of the bed and my wife kneeling beside her dressed already in her black travelling gown, her head in her mother's lap, and both women crying. It was enough to move a stone to pity.

Oh, gentlemen, how I felt!

I should have liked to rush to my carriage, call "To the station" to the coachman, and take the first train out of the place—to America, or any place where embezzling cashiers and prodigal sons go to and disappear.

But that wouldn't do.

"Iolanthe," I said humbly and contritely.

Both the women screamed. My wife clasped her mother's knees, while the mother put protecting arms around her.

"I won't annoy you, Iolanthe; I only ask your forgiveness because, out of love for you, I was so reckless."

A long silence—broken only by her sobbing.

Then her mother spoke.

"He is right, child. You must get up. It's time for you to be going." Iolanthe rose slowly, her cheeks wet, her eyes red as fire, her body still shaken with sobs. "Give him your hand. It can't be helped."

Very pleasant remark—"It can't be helped."

And Iolanthe gave me her hand, and I raised it reverently to my lips.

"George, have you seen my husband?" asked my mother-in-law.

"Yes."

"Please call him. Iolanthe wants to say good-bye."

I went back to the card room.

"Father!"

"Twelve, sixteen, twenty-seven, thirty-one."

"Father!"

"Thirty-three—what do you want?"

"We want to say good-bye."

"Well—go—and God bless you—and be happy!—thirty-six——"

"Don't you want to see Iolanthe?"

"Thirty-nine—won!—out with the cash!—

who's still got the courage for another? George, won't you take a little flyer with us?"

I got out of the room.

I told the ladies as considerately as I could that the Baron would not come. They merely looked at each other and then led the way through the smoky corridor to the back steps, where the carriage was waiting.

The wind was whistling in our ears and a few scattering raindrops struck our faces. The two women clung to each other without saying anything as though they would never let each other go.

Now the old man, who had evidently thought better of it, came running out with a great hullabaloo, and behind him the maids, whom he had summoned, with lamps and candles.

He threw himself between mother and daughter and let loose.

"My dear child, if the blessing of a loving father——"

She shook him off—just like a wet dog. With a jump into the carriage—I behind—off!

CHAPTER VII

THERE we were seated together. Torches flickering at the gate. Then everything dark and black.

Gentlemen, that was a memorable ride!

The carriage wheels splashed through the mud puddles—ss-ss-ss. The wind whistled and howled. The rain drummed on the top of the carriage—tara tata! Tara tata!

"And now, what are you going to do with her?" I asked myself.

She was not to be seen, heard, or felt. As if I were driving through the night absolutely by myself. It was not until we reached the woods and the light from the lanterns shone on the wet birch trees so that a gleam of light was reflected back into the carriage that I saw her cowering in the corner as though she were trying to press through the side and throw herself out.

Good Heavens! Such a poor little thing! Bereft of all that made up her old existence and beholding in her new world nothing but an oldish fellow who had just been dead drunk.

The devil! How ashamed of myself I felt.

"Iolanthe."

But, of course, I had to say something.

Not a sound.

"Are you afraid of me?"

"Yes."

"Won't you give me your hand?"

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"Here."

Slowly — very slowly — something soft touched my sleeve. I caught it, I held it fast, I covered it up.

Poor thing! Poor thing!

And at the same time a kind of—I might call it "sacred fire" if I wanted to be sentimental—took possession of me. In my hour of need, I found beautiful, warm, comforting words to say to her.

"You see, Iolanthe," I said, "you are now

my wife. There's no changing that. And, after all, you wanted it yourself. But you mustn't suppose I shall bother you with all sorts of amorous ways and make demands. It is a true friend who is sitting here beside you —I may say a fatherly friend, if you can get any comfort out of that—because I haven't the least idea of trying to disguise the fact that I am much older than you. So, my dear, if your heart is heavy and if you want to cry to your heart's content, you'll never find a breast on which you can rest more securely. Always come to me for refuge, just come to me even if you do feel that I am the enemy from whom you are seeking refuge."

That was very nicely said, wasn't it? It was inspired by my sympathy and by my pure unqualified good will.

Poor old me! As if a little bit of youthful fervour were not worth a thousand times more than the deepest sympathy and all that. But at the moment the impression of what I said was so strong that I myself was frightened.

With one bound she was out of her corner,

with her arms round my neck, kissing my face through her veil and saying between sobs:

"Forgive me—forgive me, you dear, dear man."

At this I thought of the scene at our engagement when she had puzzled me by the same behaviour.

"What's all this?" I said. "What am I always to forgive you for?"

She did not answer. She merely withdrew to her corner, and from then on not another sound from her lips.

The rain had stopped falling, but the wind blew at the carriage windows more madly than ever. Then—suddenly—a flash of lightning! And hard upon it a peal of thunder.

The horses reared and curvetted toward the ditch.

"Rein them in tight, John!" I cried. Of course he didn't hear me. However, the beasts stood still. His fists were like iron. I never had a better coachman.

The thunderbolt turned out to be nothing but a signal. Peal after peal followed—right

and left—everywhere. Flaming roofs, balls of fire, towers aglow, and the park all alight with a beautiful emerald green.

My good old Ilgenstein transformed into a real fairy castle.

A shiver of pure delight went through me at being able to show her the new home bathed in such splendour. All this I owed to Lothar —the dear boy—and perhaps much more. For often it is the first impression that casts the lot for a whole life.

Iolanthe leaned out of the carriage window, and in the red glow I saw her eyes looking ahead in a kind of eager or anxious searching.

"All this is yours, my dear," I said and tried to find her hand.

But she did not hear me. She seemed to be completely overwhelmed by the beautiful picture.

As we drew into the court, bedlam broke loose—a shouting and shooting, drums and trumpets, torches and lanterns on all sides, and faces blackened by smoke, glowing eyes, open mouths.

"Hurrah! Long live his Lordship! Long live her Grace! Hurrah!" Such a trampling and waving of hats! The horde of them behaved as though possessed.

"Well," I thought to myself, "now she certainly must see that she isn't married to a bad man, since his servants love him so much," and, primed for emotion as one is at such times, I began to blubber a bit.

When the carriage stopped, I saw Lothar standing in front of the door among the inspectors and apprentices. I jumped out and took him into my arms.

"My boy! My dear, dear boy!" In my thankfulness I could have kissed his hand.

When I started to assist my young wife out of the carriage, that unfortunate creature, the chief inspector, in the midst of the excitement, started to treat us to a solemn speech.

"For God's sake, Baumann," I said, "we'll take all that for granted," and I helped Iolanthe into the house.

There the housemaids were standing, curtseying and tittering, the housekeeper at their

head. But Iolanthe stared right past them.

Then I was seized by dread of what was to come.

"Oh, if you had not sent your sister away!" I thought, and looking around for help I spied Lothar in the doorway, apparently about to take leave. I rushed over to him and caught his hands.

"Come now, you aren't leaving us, are you? After all this trouble we must have something hot together—what do you say?"

He turned red as blood, but I led him over to Iolanthe, who had just been relieved of her hat and cloak.

"You must help me persuade him to stay, Iolanthe. His exertions for us have surely earned him a cup of tea."

"I ask you," she said, without even raising her eyes.

He made a stiff bow, and pulled at his moustache.

I led them through the lighted halls to the dining-room.

She looked neither to the right nor the left.

All the splendour brought into being for her sake shone unnoticed. Two or three times she reeled on my arm, and at each crisis I looked anxiously about to see if the boy was with us.

Praised be the Lord! He was still there!

In the dining-room the tea kettle was boiling, by my sister's orders before she left.

"Suppose you send for her?" flashed through my mind. "One carriage hurried off to Krakowitz, another to Gorowen—and she might be here inside of an hour."

But I, poor old blade, was ashamed to admit my helplessness. Besides, there was Lothar for me to cling to in my desperation.

Thank God, Lothar was still with us.

"Well, be seated, children." I assumed the air of being wonderfully at ease.

I can still see the whole scene. The snowy white tablecloth, the Meissen china, the old silver sugar bowl, the hanging lamp of copper overhead and in its hard light, to my right, Iolanthe, pale, stiff, with half-closed eyes, like a somnambulist; to my left, Lothar with his bushy hair and firm brown cheeks and the som-

bre fold between his brows, his eyes fixed on the tablecloth.

Seeing that evidently the boy felt *de trop* and would much rather have run away, I laid my hands affectionately on his shoulders and thanked him from the bottom of my heart for the torture he was imposing upon himself.

"Take a good look at him, Iolanthe," I said. "We three shall be sitting here like this many a time again, enjoying each other's company."

She nodded very slowly and closed her eyes altogether.

Poor thing! Poor thing! And the dread almost took my breath away.

"Be jolly, children," I said. "Lothar, tell us something funny—out of your own life. Come on now. Have you anything to smoke? No? Wait a moment, I'll get you something."

And in my anguish I made for the cigar cabinet in the next room, as though a good smoke would bring everything to a happy ending.

And then, gentlemen, when I came back with the box under my arm, I saw something

through the open door that stopped the blood in my veins.

Only once in my life have I experienced a similar shock. That was one evening when I was still a young cuirassier and I came home from a jolly party to find a telegram for me with the pleasant message, "Father just died."

But now as to what it was that I saw, gentlemen.

The two young people were sitting still and stiff on their chairs, as before, but they had, so to speak, dipped their eyes into each other's, and there was a wild, despairing, insane glow in them such as I had never thought could shine out of human eyes. It was like two flames darting sparks into each other.

So there I was. Not yet my wife, and already my friend, my son, my favourite, betraying me with her.

Adultery in the house even before the marriage had really been consummated.

In that look my whole future—an existence of suspicion, and dread and gloom and ridicule,

full of grey days and sleepless nights—lay unrolled before me like a map.

What was I to do, gentlemen?

My impulse was to take her by the hand and say to him, "She's yours, my boy. I have no longer any right over her."

But please put yourselves in my position. A look is something intangible and undemonstrable. It may be denied with a smile. And, after all, might I not have been mistaken?

And while I revolved this in my mind, the two pairs of eyes continued to cling to each other in complete oblivion of everything about them.

When I walked into the room, there was not even a twitch of an eyelid. They even turned toward me as if in surprise and indignation and as if to ask:

"Why does this old man, this stranger, intrude upon us?"

I felt inclined to roar out like a wounded beast. However, I collected myself and offered the cigars. But I felt I had to put an end to the business quickly. All kinds of red

suns were beginning to dance in front of my eyes.

So I said, "Go home, my boy, it's time."

He rose heavily, gave me an icy handshake, and made his lieutenant's bow to her with joined heels, and turned towards the door.

Then I heard a cry—a cry that pierced me to the quick.

And what did I see?

My wife, my young wife, lying at his feet, holding on to his coat with both hands, and crying, "You must not die! You must not die!"

Well, gentlemen, the catastrophe at last!

For a moment I stood like a man hit over the head. Then I caught Lothar by the collar.

"Stop, my boy," I said, "that's enough. I won't have any tricks played on me."

Still holding his collar I led him gently back to his seat, closed the doors, and lifted my wife, who was lying on the floor weeping convulsively, to a couch.

But she caught my hands and started to kiss

them, whimpering, "Don't let him go! He wants to kill himself—he wants to kill himself!"

"And why do you want to kill yourself, my boy?" said I. "If you had prior rights to mine, why did you not assert them? Why did you deceive your best friend?"

He pressed his hands to his forehead and remained silent.

Then I fell into a rage and said, "Say something, or I'll knock you down like a mad dog!"

"Do it," he said, stretching out his arms. "I have deserved nothing better."

"Deserved or not—now you must tell me what all this means."

Well, gentlemen, then I learned the whole pretty story from the two of them together, to the accompaniment of self-reproaches, tears and bended knees.

Years before they had met in the woods and fell in love for ever after—hopelessly and silently, as behooved the offspring of two feuding families—Montagues and Capulets.

"Did you confess your love to each other?"

No, but they had kissed each other.

"And then?"

Then he had gone on garrison duty in Berlin and they heard no more of each other. They did not dare to write, and each was uncertain of the other's affection.

Then came the death of old Pütz and my attempt to bring about a reconciliation. When I appeared at Krakowitz, Iolanthe conceived the plan at first of making me a confident of her love. In fact, she hoped to receive a message through me. Nothing of the kind. Instead, I misunderstood her tender glances and played the enamoured swain myself. Then, when her father's burst of rage proved clearly that there never would be a bit of hope for her, she decided in her despair to avail herself of the one possible way of at least getting near her beloved.

"Ah, but, my dear, that was really a contemptible thing for you to do."

"But I longed for him so," she answered, as though that made everything right.

"Very good—excellent! But you, my son, why didn't you come and say, 'Uncle, I love her, she loves me, hands off!' "

"But I did not know if she still loved me."

"Splendid! You are a precious pair of innocents, you two. When did you finally find out?"

"To-day—while you were asleep."

And now came a terrible story. After dinner, on leaving the table, a single handshake in silence showed each how miserable the other one was, and seeing no way out, they decided to die that very night.

"What! You, too?"

Instead of answering Iolanthe pulled out of her pocket a little bottle from which a human skull grinned at me.

"What's that?"

"Cyanide of potassium."

"The devil! Where did you get that from?"

Presented to her some years ago by a friend of hers at the dancing school, a chemist whose head she had turned. She had asked him to give her the pleasant drink.

"And you were going to take that stuff, you little goose, you?"

She looked at me with big glaring eyes and nodded two or three times.

I understood very well, and a shudder passed down my back. A fine bridal night it might have been!

"And now? What am I going to do with the two of you now?"

"Save us! Help us! Have mercy on us!"

They were on their knees before me, licking my hands.

And because I, as you know, gentlemen, am a professional good fellow, I devised a means of bringing my failure of a marriage to a speedy end.

John was ordered to hitch up, and fifteen minutes later, without any to-do, I was driving my twelve-hour bride to Gorowen to my sister, under whose protection she was to remain until the divorce had been decreed—under no circumstances would she return to her father's house.

Lothar asked me quite naïvely if he might not go with us.

"You rascal!" I said. "Off home with you!"

At the right time and place, gentlemen, I can be very severe.

. . . . .

It was striking half-past four as I got back to Ilgenstein.

I was beastly tired. My legs were hanging from my body like pieces of dead wood. Everything was quiet, as I had sent the whole household to bed before going.

Walking along the corridor, where the lights were still burning, I saw a door decorated with wreaths. It led to the bridal chamber which my sister had kept locked up till then as a surprise.

Moved by curiosity I opened the door and looked in. I beheld a purple sepulchral vault, a mixture of strange scents almost choked me. Everything was hung with curtains and draperies, and from the ceiling swung a real lighted church lamp. In the background, on a raised dais, there had been erected a sort of

catafalque with golden ornaments and silken covers.

It was there that I should have had to sleep!

"B-r-r-r!" I said and shut the door and ran away as quickly as my limping legs would carry me.

And then I came to my own room and lit my lovely bright students' lamp. It smiled at me like the sun itself.

In the corner stood my old narrow camp bed with its red-stained posts, the grey straw bag, and the worn deerskin robe.

Well, gentlemen, you can imagine how delicious I felt.

I undressed, lit a good cigar, jumped into bed, and read an interesting chapter of the history of the Franco-Prussian War.

And I can assure you, gentlemen, that I never slept more soundly than on my bridal night.

THE WOMAN WHO WAS HIS FRIEND

OH, how tired I am, dear lady! I've been writing New Year's letters the whole day and have disposed of everything that has gone unanswered the entire year. Goodness, what ancient debts turned up! And what an awful lazybones I've been! The number of good friends that I've insulted through sheer neglect, the number of little thorns I've left sticking in people's flesh! But enough said.

I sent out New Year's cards, too, and you will also receive my card on New Year's morning with a stiff "Many wishes for a Happy New Year" and not so much as even a sugary little verse beside the 1/1/86.

Don't laugh. On second thought 1/1 is a highly significant figure, and we oughtn't to make fun of it the way I did. The day it des-

ignates is a turning-point for people's hearts. On that day love changes its residence. Not always, of course. Many people have a contract for a number of years, for life even, and it's a good snug berth that love falls into in homey dwelling-places like that. But the giddy creatures, the butterflies—if one may speak of butterflies at New Year—the ones that have been evicted and all the others who are looking for new quarters either out of choice or out of necessity—you see them preparing at New Year's time for moving in or moving out.

Why just at New Year's time, you ask?

Another season has begun, new relations are entered into, new intrigues are woven, inclinations newly awakened crop up shyly to the surface. Christmas belonged to the old era still; the happiness comfortably enjoying itself in dressing-gown and slippers still held sway over the discomforts of the new passion knocking turbulently at the door. But now, at New Year, there's a general clearing out, and all

worn love-goods are disposed of "previous to removal," as the advertisements read.

The heart's change of residence is probably the saddest there is. Many things get broken and many a cherished memento falls into the gutter. But if it cannot be prevented, then the moving may as well be done thoroughly and energetically.

"Off with the old love before you're on with the new."

A truth of startling pregnancy. Many a person has arrived too late because he lingered too long saying good-bye. Piles of novels could be written on this subject.

Sometimes, too, the heart stays in the old house but moves to another apartment. Then hate follows love and love follows hate, the latter, at least, in Marlitt's romances. And more than this, friendship moves in where love once dwelt.

And then, finally, there are the cases in which friendship clears the way for love.

You shake your head. You believe friendship never clears the way for love? You mean

because we two friends are so proof against love? Oh, we are the exception. Between us rises the intellectual love of truth like a crystal wall in the Arctic Ocean. But I can give you examples, my dear lady, any number of examples, of friendship clearing the way for love. And mostly unhappy examples.

It seems to be an iron law of happiness that love should begin with passion and end in the peace of tranquil friendship—marriage, I mean. The reverse way is not excluded, but it leads—to the desert.

There are abstract enthusiasts that construe the marriage of souls as a necessary preliminary to physical love. But nature punishes lying. When friendship between a man and a woman ends in love, either the friendship or the love is not true. And woe, woe if the friendship has not been friendship but love.

Apropos of this—do you happen to remember the portrait of a woman that created such a stir at the exhibition two or three years ago and brought the painter so much fame and so many orders? A frail figure, almost too frail,

in a simple black velvet dress. A thin suffering face, a pale forehead with the crown on it of the quiet aristocracy of thought. Half-closed dreamy eyes, a bluish gleam from between dark lashes. Upper lip covered with fine down and an expression of longing and smiling melancholy about the mouth. Now I remember to a dot. You and I admired the picture together. You stood studying it a long time and then said:

"That's the way I fancy Vittoria Colonna must have looked."

I said nothing to that. I was astonished by your keenness, because there really were many resemblances of character between the lady of the portrait and Michael Angelo's unhappy friend. Her fate, too, was curiously like Vittoria Colonna's. Of course, I may not tell how I came to know her story. At that time it was still in progress, and the change that came later—well——

She was the widow of a well-known architect. His house was a social centre for a swarm of talented young artists, among them

K———, the painter of the portrait. He was a jolly young fellow, easy-going and saucy. The maelstrom of the years at the Academy had not destroyed the perfect childlikeness of his genius, and, as a result, the air of being blasé and weighted with the woes of the world that he put on in deference to his varied experiences was all the more becoming as at the slightest provocation he dropped this manner and burst into a ringing laugh.

Hedwig soon realised there was a sound core to the young man's rather giddy character, and since everybody felt that his talent was of the first order and only needed a little cultivation to bear glorious fruit, she took pleasure in looking out for him. And he, for his part, surrendered himself ardently to the guidance of a woman a few years older than himself, a woman whom he came to adore.

He brought her his sketches, and she passed upon them, with a sharp eye for both the painter's sense of form and for the tiniest slip of his still uncertain hand. He made her the confidante of his creative ideas, which gushed

from his brain impetuously, and he received them back from her matured and refined. There was not a corner of his heart that did not lie open to her view, and she was wise enough even to place the right estimate upon the youthful coarseness with which his sentiments sometimes bubbled over. Another woman might have felt hurt, while she took it as evidence of his surplus of strength, and smiled and gently poked fun at him, and so brought harmony out of the chaos within him.

She showered riches on him, and what she got back in return was scarcely less in value. Held fast at the side of an ill-tempered aging husband, an ailing woman herself and growing weaker from year to year, she had matured in mind at an early age; and she had paid toll in the loss of youthful spirits and elasticity. But now whole streams of a fresh blithe life poured out of him into her. She felt rejuvenated in his presence. And a tender motherliness, the shadow of a joy that had been denied her, was interwoven with her other feelings for him.

Her husband was glad to see his lonely wife occupied and did not interfere. And why should he have interfered? Never was there less occasion for jealousy. The young scapegrace, as a matter of fact, even confided his love affairs to her, and she tried by smiling advice to render them at least innocuous enough not to hamper the development of his talent.

Three years passed. Hedwig's husband died. Her illness had grown worse, and at the physician's advice she went south, to Nice.

She lived in great retirement, broken into only now and then, when a young genius long of hair and none too clean of shirt turned up in her modest drawing-room, generally in money difficulties and bringing a letter of recommendation from her friend.

Her one diversion was corresponding with K———, whose work and position kept him in Berlin.

He often wrote her that he adored her like a saint.

She, for her part, parried his onslaughts of

ecstasy and was satisfied that in spite of his volatile nature and his growing fame, he preserved his old liking for her.

Three years more passed. Then, once, late in autumn he suddenly appeared at Nice, tired, worn out by work, spiritually desolate, unsteadier than ever, but—a full-grown man.

"I have come to be cured by you," he exclaimed the first time he was in her house.

She wept for joy.

Soon they dropped into greater intimacy than ever, and yet she sometimes experienced a sense of shyness which she had not felt before in her relation with him, for the very reason that he was no longer the boy she could look down on with unconstrained motherliness. The difference in years seemed to have been wiped out, inwardly as well as outwardly, and he had grown close to her intellectually, alarmingly close.

He often complained to her of his afflictions —the miserable headaches that kept bothering him, the result of overwork, and then the worries of his profession, the disillusionments.

They were by no means formidable, but easily too much for the spoiled darling of fortune. She devoured everything he said. The least little thing of concern to him assumed prodigious importance.

But there seemed to be a good deal that he did not tell her.

"And how about the women?" she asked, smiling, though tortured by suddenly rising jealousy.

"Oh, let's not talk of the women. I've forgotten every one of them. Now you are my one and only one."

She thrilled, but said nothing. Oh, had he known how *her* whole being lost itself in his!

These words of his caressed her from now on, echoing even in her sleep at night.

They celebrated Christmas together.

When the candles were burning on the tree and the homelike scent of pine and apples filled the room, he caught her hands, looked long into her eyes smiling, and said:

"You know, you and I ought really to marry."

She felt her blood bounding hot through her veins, but she held on to herself, and burst out laughing.

"You think I'm joking," he went on. "No, no, I'm not. I am in deep earnest. You yourself tell me—we're each of us alone, we don't care about the world, we have come to understand each other as no other two people on earth have ever understood each other. Why should we not share our fate the rest of our lives?"

"Now do be sensible," she said, trying to keep up a show of lightness, "and don't talk such nonsense any more; for nonsense it is, whether said in fun or in deep earnest. Exactly what you need—a woman hanging round your neck who is five years older than you and soon will be altogether faded. Besides, you don't strike me as having been born to be a nurse, and you know I am slowly making my way graveward. So the matter's settled."

That night she cried to herself.

The next day his headache bothered him worse than ever. With her he was privileged

to make himself comfortable, and he stretched out on the sofa, and she adjusted the cushions under his head.

"Your hands are always so cool," he said. "In the days of old you sometimes used to stroke my forehead so soothingly. It did me no end of good. I have spoiled my chance for that form of happiness, too."

She passed her shaking hand over his head and brow, and when she touched his cheek, he caught her fingers in both his hands.

"Let them stay there," he said with a great sigh. "My cheeks are on fire."

Her cheeks were burning, too.

Christmas week went by, and the man and the woman drew still closer together in the solitude of their hearts. New Year's eve came, and they decided to wait up and greet the new year together.

Hedwig was preparing the tea, and he was leaning back in an easy chair, smoking cigarettes and looking through the blue clouds at her housewifely ways. There was a rosy sheen

on her cheeks and something like the promise of happiness glittering in her eyes.

He felt so happy and yet so oppressed that he wanted to jump up and clasp her in his arms simply to lift the burden from his soul.

She spoke little. She seemed occupied with her own thoughts, and he with his.

At about eleven o'clock there was a noise on the street, and the red glow of smoking torches came through the window. It was a procession of masqueraders got up by a private society, a foretaste of the public carnival to follow.

She opened the French window and they went out on the balcony, on which potted pomegranate-trees were in full bloom. It was a soft warm night, like our own nights in spring. The stars were sparkling, and a vague shimmer lay upon the ocean.

As the giddy throng flowed past below them whistling and hooting and laughing, he felt her arm laid on his almost anxiously.

"Aren't we standing here as on an isolated rock in mid-ocean?" he whispered.

She nodded and pressed herself against him softly.

"And yet have to remain strangers," he went on.

She made no reply, and lowered her head to dip it into the mass of blossoms. He felt the quivering of her body.

"Hedwig," he said softly.

She shrank. It was the first time he had ever called her by her first name.

"Hedwig."

"What is it?"

"Hedwig, my heart's so full. I must thank you. I must tell you loving things. What would I be without you? Whatever I am I owe to you. Hedwig, I can't bear any longer to be standing beside you so stiff and so cold while my heart is throbbing. I must get some air—I must tell you——"

"Oh, God!" she breathed, clapping her hands to her face and rushing back into the room, where she dropped down on a settee.

He followed her and caught both her hands.

She was panting.

"Let us talk sensibly," she said, making an effort to sit up erect. "Sit down—there—and listen to me." He obeyed mechanically. "Why can't things stay the same as they always have been between us? Wasn't it lovely? Didn't we use to enjoy each other? And now suddenly something has seethed up in us that makes us ungrateful for all the happiness we had. We mustn't give in. It would plunge us—me, at least—into unhappiness. You see, a few days ago you told me I was your one and only one. I feel that in a certain sense I really am, and that makes me proud and happy. But the moment we want to reap love where we sowed friendship, the magic departs that held us in its spell for so long. Until then I shall have been your one and only one. Afterward I shall be—one more."

He started.

"What an ugly notion!" he said dully.

"Ugly, perhaps, but all the truer," she replied, plucking at the tablecloth with palsied fingers. "We must not surrender to self-deception. This moment determines our future.

It lies within our power to decide which way we shall go. You know that—I—love you—and that—I am lonely. So have pity on me. Spare me suffering. I should like to mean as much in your life as I always have."

"You are to mean *more* in my life, not less!" he cried, putting his hands to his forehead. "I want to devote myself to you altogether, with all my body, all my soul, and all my art. I want to have peace—peace from the world without and peace from the passions within. And where could I be surer of finding peace than with you?"

She drew a deep sigh, as if in awakening hope, and her gaze hung on his ardently.

At that instant the hands of the clock were close on twelve.

"A few moments," he said, "and the year will be over—a new one will be coming. Shall it forever remain the same for me, always doing futile empty things? And shall it always remain the same for you, always living in sadness and loneliness? Ahead of us is darkness,

and, crouching in the darkness like a hungry beast, is the grave."

She shuddered.

"Soon it will have us in its clutches at any rate. Why should we doubt and hesitate? It's all the same whatever we do. In the background stands Nothing. So let us be happy as long as there is still intoxication in life."

The clock struck twelve.

Each stroke was like the flapping of wings of some lonely straying soul.

With a sob she fell on his breast.

. . . . .

At the same time a year later Hedwig was sitting in the same room—but alone. He had meant to be there by Christmas, but then had postponed his coming until New Year, and by New Year's eve he had not yet arrived. Instead a letter had come. She had been reading it over and over again for hours.

She had aged greatly and bore the marks of intense suffering. A hard bitter smile hovered about her lips. Her cheeks were aflame with the fires of death, while she stared at the

phrases in the letter, forced hollow phrases of tenderness, forced because he was embarrassed.

She sank down in front of the settee on the same spot on which he had kneeled a year before, a woman tortured and humbled to death; and hiding her face in the cushions, she murmured:

"One more!"

. . . . .

Dear lady, why are you looking at me so mournfully? What's the story to us?

In the first place *I* am not a genius; secondly, *you* haven't got the talent for being deserted, and, thirdly, we shall stay the same good old friends we've always been even after New Year.

THE NEW YEAR'S EVE CONFESSION

AH, dear lady, it's good to be here with you again, sitting so peacefully in this comfortable chair, ready for a cosy chat. Thank goodness, the holiday hubbub is over and done with and you have a little leisure for me again.

Oh, the Christmas season! I do believe it was invented by the devil especially for the annoyance of us bachelors, to impress upon us the dreariness of our homeless lives. The thing that is a source of delight to others is a torture to us. Of course, of course, we're not all of us lonely. The joy of bestowing joy blooms for most of us, too. But the pure pleasure of sharing pleasure with others is embittered partly by a dose of ironical self-criticism, partly by that acid yearning which I might call, instead of homesickness, marriagesickness.

Why did I not come and pour my heart out to you? you ask, you sympathetic soul, who bestow consolation as generously as most of your sex bestow petty spite. Ah, but you see, the matter is not so simple. Don't you know what Speidel says in his charmingly chatty "Lonely Sparrows," which you, correctly divining the state of my soul, sent me on the third day of the holiday? He says, "The genuine bachelor does not *want* to be consoled. Once having become unhappy, he wants to indulge his unhappiness."

Beside Speidel's lonely sparrow, there is also a species of confirmed old bachelors, family friends. I do not mean those professional destroyers of the family who insinuate themselves hypocritically with evil intent while making themselves comfortable at the hospitable hearth. I mean the good old uncle, papa's whilom schoolmate, who dandles baby on his knees while respectably reading aloud to mamma the story in the evening paper with omission of the indecent passages.

I know men whose whole life goes in the

service of a family with which they have become friendly, men who pass their days without desire beside a lovely woman whom they secretly adore.

You are sceptical? Oh, it is the "without desire" that you object to? You may be right. In the depths of even the tamest heart there probably lurks a wild desire, but a desire—it is understood—that is held in check.

I should like to give you an example and tell you of a conversation that two ancient gentlemen had with each other this very New Year's eve. You must not ask me how I found out about the conversation, and you must not tell it to any one else. May I begin?

Picture, as the scene, a high-ceilinged room furnished in an old-fashioned style and dimly lighted by a green-shaded, brightly polished hanging lamp, such as our parents used before the era of kerosene; the light falling upon a round table covered with a white cloth and set with the ingredients for mixing a New Year's punch, and in the centre a few drippings of oil spreading slowly.

My two ancient gentlemen sat half in the dimness cast by the green shade. Mouldy ruins they were of a time long past, each tremulously sunk in himself and each staring into space with the dim eyes and the dull look of old age. The one, the host, was a military man, as was clear at first glance from his close-fitting stock, his pointed moustache, shaved off under the points, and his eyebrows knitted in a martial frown. He sat huddled in a rolling chair and clutched the handle of the steering rod with both hands like a crooked walking-stick. Nothing about him stirred except his lower jaw, which went up and down incessantly with a chewing movement. The other, who was sitting beside him on the sofa, was tall and thin, with narrow shoulders and the head of a thinker, angular and broad of brow. He drew skimpy clouds of smoke from a long pipe that was about to go out. Snowy white curls framed his face, and in the thousand fine lines of his smooth, dried-up skin nestled a soft, quiet smile, such as nothing but the peace

of renunciation can impress upon an aged countenance.

They sat without talking. In the silence you could hear the slight bubbling of the burning oil mingled with the slight bubbling of the tobacco juice. Then the clock on the wall in the dark background wheezed and struck eleven.

"This is about the time you usually brew the punch," said the man with the thinker's head. His voice sounded soft and quavered a little.

"Yes, this is the time," the other rejoined. His tone was harsh, as if again resounding with the strident shouts of command.

"I should never have thought," the guest continued, "that it would be so sad without her."

The host nodded and chewed on.

"She made the New Year's punch for us forty-four times."

"Yes," the old soldier put in, "ever since I have been living here in Berlin and you have been coming to see us."

"Last year at this time," the guest con-

tinued, "we three were still together, so happily. She sat there in the easy chair, knitting socks for Paul's oldest child, and hurrying as fast as she could. They had to be finished by twelve o'clock, she said. And they were. Then we drank the punch and very comfortably discussed death. And two months later she actually was carried out to the cemetery. You know I wrote a thick volume on the immortality of the idea. You never could bear it. I cannot bear it any more either since your wife died. As a matter of fact, I don't give a fig for any philosophic ideas any more."

"Yes, she was a good woman," said the husband of the deceased. "She took good care of me. When I had to be out for service by five o'clock in the morning, she was always up ahead of me and saw to it that I had a good cup of coffee before I left. To be sure, she had her faults, too. When once she got to philosophising with you—whew!"

"You simply never understood her," murmured the guest, something like restrained resentment quivering about the corners of his

mouth, though the look he allowed to rest on his friend a long time was mild and sad, as though his soul carried the secret consciousness of guilt.

After a period of silence, he began:

"Listen, Franz, I must tell you something —something that has been gnawing at me a long while. I cannot possibly go down into the grave carrying it along with me."

"Fire away, then," said Franz, and picked up the long pipe leaning against his rolling chair.

"Once something—happened between—me and your wife."

"Please don't joke, Doc," said Franz.

"I'm in grim earnest, Franz. I have been carrying it round with me for more than forty years, and now the time has come at last to make a clean breast of it."

"Do you mean to say my wife deceived me?" the old soldier shouted in a rage.

"Shame on you, Franz," said the philosopher, with his sad, mild smile.

Franz mumbled and muttered a little and then lighted his pipe.

"No, she was pure as an angel," the philosopher went on. "You and I are the criminals. Listen to me. It was forty-three years ago. You had just been ordered to Berlin as a captain, and I was teaching at the University. You know what a wild fellow you were then."

"Hm," said Franz, and raised his shaking hand to twist the points of his moustache.

"There was a beautiful actress with big black eyes and small white teeth. Do you remember?"

"Do I remember! Bianca was her name." A feeble smile flitted across the old man's weatherbeaten countenance with the marks on it of hard and fast living. "She could bite, I tell you, she could bite!"

"You deceived your wife, and she suspected it. But she never said anything, and suffered in silence. You did not notice it, but I did. She was the first woman I got to know after my mother's death. She came into my life like a shining star, and I looked up to her as to a

shining star. Finally I summoned up the courage to ask her what was troubling her. She smiled and said she was not feeling quite well yet. You remember, it was only a short while before that Paul had been born. Then came New Year's eve—exactly forty-three years ago this very night. I came to your house at about eight o'clock, as usual. She sat embroidering, and I read to her while we waited for you. The hours passed, one by one. You did not come. I saw how uneasy she became and how she began to tremble, and I trembled with her. I knew what was keeping you, and I was afraid that you would forget twelve o'clock in that woman's arms. It was getting very near the hour. She stopped embroidering, and I stopped reading, and an awful silence descended on us. I saw a tear creep out slowly from between her lashes and fall down on her embroidery. I jumped up and wanted to go out and bring you home. I felt capable of tearing you by force from that woman's side. But at the same instant your

wife jumped up, too, from this very seat I am sitting on.

" 'Where are you going?' she cried. There was unspeakable dread in her face.

" 'I am going to get Franz,' I said.

"At that she fairly screamed.

" 'For goodness sake, stay with me. At least *you* stay with me. Don't *you* leave me.'

"And she threw herself on me and laid her hands on my shoulders and hid her wet face on my chest. My whole body quivered. Never before had a woman been so close to me. But I held on to myself and spoke to her comfortingly. She so needed comforting. Soon after, you came back. You did not notice my confusion. Your cheeks were flushed and there was a love-drunken weariness in your eyes.

"That New Year's eve produced a change in me, which filled me with alarm. Since I had felt her soft arms around my neck and had drawn in the perfume of her hair, the star had fallen from heaven, and instead of the star it was the *woman,* the woman, beautiful, and breathing love. I knew there was ardour in

my glances, and I denounced myself as a blackguard, a deceiver, and to make at least partial atonement to my conscience, I went to work to separate you from your mistress. Fortunately I had some money, which I had inherited, and she was satisfied with the sum I offered her, and——"

"By Jingo," the old soldier interjected, "so you're the one to blame for Bianca's writing me that touching good-bye letter in which she told me it was with a breaking heart that she had to forego my love?"

"Yes, I am the one to blame for it. But listen. I had expected to purchase peace with the money I gave her. I was mistaken. The wild thoughts kept going round and round in my brain worse and worse. I buried myself in my work. It was just then that I conceived the central thought for my 'Immortality of the Idea.' No use. Peace did not come that way.

"And so a whole year went by, and another New Year's eve arrived. I was sitting beside her on this seat once again. This time you

were at home, but you were lying asleep on the sofa in the next room, tired out by a jollification at the club. Sitting there, close beside her, looking at her pale face, the recollection of the New Year's eve before came back and overwhelmed me irresistibly. Just to feel her head at my neck once again, just to kiss her once again, and then let come what may! Our glances met for an instant. It seemed to me that a secret understanding flashed into her eyes. I could not control myself any longer. I dropped at her feet and hid my burning face in her lap.

"I lay there like that, motionless, for possibly two seconds, when I felt her hand cool on my head and heard her say softly and gently:

" 'You must be good.'

"Yes, I must be good. I must not deceive the man sleeping in the next room so trustfully. I jumped up and looked about, disconcerted. She picked up a book from the table and handed it to me. I knew what she meant and opened the book at random and started to

read aloud. I do not know what I read. The letters danced before my eyes. But gradually the storm in my soul subsided, and when it struck twelve and you, with a sleepy look in your eyes, came in to wish us a Happy New Year, I felt as though that instant of sin lay far, far behind me, in an era long past.

"From that time on I became calmer. I knew she did not return my love and I had nothing to hope for from her but compassion. The years went by. Your children grew up and married. We three grew old. You gave up sowing wild oats and lived for only the one woman, like myself. I did not stop loving her. No, that was impossible. But my love took on other forms. It discarded earthly desires and turned into a spiritual communion. You often used to laugh when you heard us philosophising. But had you divined how my soul became one with hers, it would have made you very jealous. And now she's dead. Perhaps by next New Year's eve we shall have followed her. That is why it is high time for me to unburden myself of my secret and say

to you, 'Franz, I once did you a wrong. Forgive me!' "

He held out his hand to his friend pleadingly, but Franz answered testily:

"Bah, stuff and nonsense! A lot to forgive! This news of yours, this confession, is stale. I've known it for ages. She herself told me all about it forty years ago. And now I'll tell you the reason I ran after women the way I did until I was an old man—because, when she told me, she also said that you were the only man she had ever loved."

His guest stared at him in silence. The clock on the wall wheezed and struck twelve o'clock.

THE GOOSE HERD

MY dear man, I've been listening to you now for a long while and you fill me with astonishment. You usually show—more than I do myself—an honest wish to take things as they are. Then whence all of a sudden, in making these nice observations of human emotions, do you draw this idealistic illusion of yours?

It seems to me your levelling-down democratic sentiment has been playing you a naughty trick again. You maintain, if I understand you correctly, that there is not a profound difference in the way the various social classes feel and express their feelings; while, as a matter of fact, life proves the very reverse every day. Oh, it would be beautiful as a dream if you were right. The ideals of brotherhood and equality that I, the bred-in-the-bone aristocrat—that is what you say I am—must necessarily consider mere figments

of the brain, would then be reality, or, rather, have already become reality; because the bit of knowledge more or less cannot possibly produce an organic difference in men's natures.

No, no, dear sir, it is the cleavage in the way they feel, more than all differences in wealth, rank, and learning, that separates the upper from the lower classes; so much so that they go through the world together each without comprehension of what the other does, like citizens of different globes. Woe to him who hopes to leap the gap!

You don't believe me? You shake your head? Oh, my dear man, I am speaking from experience. Alas, alas! If I could tell you—but why shouldn't I? Night is falling outside, the November storm is howling, and to-day I celebrated the advent of my thirtieth grey hair —quite the atmosphere for conjuring up a picture of light, spring and youth.

Let me close my eyes, and you listen to me like a good little boy. I want to tell you of my first love. Do you know who my first love

was? A goose-herd, a real, out-and-out goose-herd. I am not joking. I have wept bitter tears over the wrong he did me, and that when I had long been a grown-up, highly respectable young lady.

To be sure, when he first set my heart afire, I was still of the age when my highest ideal of happiness was to go barefoot. I was eight years old, he ten. I was the daughter of the lord of the castle, he, the son of our smith.

Mornings, when I took breakfast on the verandah with my mother and big brother, he used to pass by with his geese and disappear in the direction of the pasture. At first he stared up at us with naïve astonishment, it never occurring to him to raise his cap. Then my brother impressed it upon him that it was proper to give the family a decent greeting, and from that time on he always called up a "Good mornin' to you" like a lesson learned by heart and with a long sweep of his cap.

If my brother happened to be in a good humour, I received permission to take a roll down to him, and he always snatched it out

of my hand with a certain greedy anxiety, as if there were danger of my withdrawing it at the last moment.

What did he look like? I can still see him as if he were right there in front of me. His straight flaxen hair hung down over his sunburned cheeks like a thatched roof, with his blue eyes peering from underneath, jolly and cunning. He wore his ragged trousers rolled up over his knees, and always carried an osier switch, into which, along the green bark, he had cleverly cut white spirals.

It was upon this switch that my childish covetousness first fastened itself. How fascinating to hold in my hand a marvellous piece of work like that, so different from all my toys! And when I pictured to myself being allowed to chase geese with it and to go barefoot, the pinnacle of earthly happiness had been reached.

And it was this same switch that brought us into human contact. One morning at breakfast, as I saw him going by so cheerily, I could no longer restrain my desire. I furtively put together the pieces of the roll spread with

honey that I was eating and asked hurriedly to be excused, and ran after him.

When he saw me coming, he stopped and looked at me wonderingly. But as soon as he caught sight of the roll in my hand, a gleam of comprehension shot into his eyes.

"Will you give me your switch?" I asked.

"Why?" he asked back, and put one foot up to rub the calf of his other leg.

"Because I want it," I said defiantly, then added more gently, "I'll give you my roll spread with honey for it."

He let his eyes rest longingly on the piece of deliciousness, and then finally observed, "No, I have to have it for the geese, but I'll cut another one like it for you."

"Can you do that?"

I was all astonishment.

"Oh, that's nothing," he pooh-poohed. "I can make flutes, too, and jumping jacks."

I was so completely carried off my feet that I handed him the roll on the spot. He bit into it with gusto, and, not honouring me with an-

other glance, he drove his feathered flock off before him.

I looked after him, envy in my heart. *He* was allowed to shepherd geese, but *I* had to go up to Mademoiselle and learn French. Yes, I thought, how unequal fortune's favours are.

That evening he brought me the switch he had promised to make. It was even more beautiful than I had dared to hope in my wildest dreams. There were the white spirals that had so fascinated me in the original, and more than that, the butt-end was topped with a knob, on which a human countenance—whether mine or his, I could not unriddle—was depicted by two dots and two dashes at right angles.

From that time on we were friends. I shared with him all the goodies that fell to me, the spoiled little darling, from every side. In return, he bestowed upon me the artistic products of his skilful fingers, reed pipes, little boxes, houses, toy utensils, and, best of all, his famous jumping jacks.

Our meetings took place every evening behind the goose coops, and there we exchanged

gifts. I looked forward the whole day to these meetings, my thoughts constantly engaged by my young hero. I saw him on the sunny pasture lying in the grass, blowing his reed pipes, while I was torturing myself with horrid vowels. And the yearning grew ever stronger within me to partake of that bliss which is called minding geese.

When I told him of my feelings, he burst out laughing.

"Why don't you come along, then?" he said.

That tipped the scales, and without a second's reflection, "All right," I said, "I'll go along to-morrow."

"Don't forget to bring something to eat along," my friend forewarned me.

Luck was with me. Mademoiselle's headache came at the very opportune moment, and the French lesson was dispensed with. Feverish with joy and excitement, I sat at the breakfast table waiting for him to go by. My pockets were stuffed with goodies of all sorts, which I had wheedled out of Mademoiselle, and beside me lay the switch, which I looked

forward to swinging that day in the strict fulfilment of my duty.

Ah, there he was coming. His blue eyes glanced up at me slily as he bellowed his "Good mornin' to you" at us; and the instant I could slip away without attracting attention I was off after him.

"What have you brought along?" was his first question.

"Two little ginger cakes, three cervelat sandwiches, a roll cut in two with sardelles between, and a piece of gooseberry pie," said I, spreading out my glories.

He fell upon them at once, while I with carefully concealed glee proudly drove the geese along.

After passing through the fir woods, the first part of which was somewhat familiar to me from my previous walks, we came to regions less and less well known. Stunted undergrowth rose on each side of the way, making an uncanny thicket, and then, all of a sudden, the broad, boundless heath opened up to my vision.

Oh, how lovely it was, how lovely! As far as the eye reached, a sea of grass and gaily coloured flowers. Molehills covered with turf stretched away in long rows like motionless waves. The hot air quivered, fairly dancing on the breezy heath, while the buzzing of the bees made the accompaniment. And high up in the deep blue heavens stood the golden sun.

At the edge of the woods was a marsh with gleaming puddles of greyish yellow, thickish water. The refuse of the geese floated on the surface, and roundabout on the ground—so moist that great bubbles gushed up between the clumps of grass—were thousands of fine tracks of the geese's feet, making the whole spot look like a patterned rug.

This was the flock's paradise. Here we made halt, and while the geese settled themselves comfortably in the puddles, we chased about on the heath, shouting and laughing, caught yellow butterflies, and picked blueberries.

Then we played husband and wife. Elsie, the tamest of the geese, was our child. We

kissed and whipped the poor creature almost to death, but it finally succeeded, after prodigious efforts, in making its escape from our clutches. Next, I prepared the meals for my husband. I untied my white apron, spread it on the ground for a tablecloth, and placed on it the remnants of the food I had brought along. He sat down to the repast pompously, and when I saw the rapidity with which he finished up one bit after the other, I nearly jumped out of our little home for joy.

The hours passed as in a dream. Higher and higher rose the sun, until its rays came burning down on us perpendicularly. My head began to spin, and a dull lassitude came over me. Also, I experienced considerable hunger, but my spouse had already consumed everything. The inside of my mouth was dry, my lips were feverish. To cool them, I held moist blades of grass against them.

Suddenly, from beyond the woods, from way far away, came the ringing of a bell. I knew what it meant. It was the summons to the midday meal, which called me to table, too.

And if they missed me! Oh, God, what would become of me?

I threw myself on the grass and began to cry bitterly, while my companion, meaning to comfort me, passed his rough hands over my face and neck.

Suddenly I jumped up and made a dash for the woods, as though pursued by the furies. It must have been about two hours that I strayed about in the undergrowth crying. Then I caught the sound of voices calling my name, and a few moments later I was in my brother's arms.

The next morning my poor friend appeared in the part of abductor and seducer before the high criminal court of the lord of the manor. He seemed to take it for granted that he was to be the scapegoat and was in for a flogging, and he made not the slightest attempt to shift part of the blame from himself. He accepted the chastisement my brother inflicted upon him with the greatest calm. Then he rubbed his aching back against a porch column, smiling dolefully, and, after that, hastily made off,

while I, sobbing aloud, rolled on the floor.

From that day on I loved him. I plotted a thousand wiles and schemes for meeting him secretly. I nabbed edibles like a magpie, so that he might regale himself with the fruits of my pilferings. I fairly oppressed him with the profusion of fond attentions, with which I tried to wipe out of existence those frightful blows of my brother's whip.

He accepted my love calmly and rewarded me for it by a devotion that was moving and an appetite that was sound.

Fate separated us six months later.

My mother had been ailing for some time, and the physician now recommended her living in the south. She put the estate entirely in my brother's charge and moved to the Riviera, taking me along.

. . . . .

Nine years were to elapse before I came back home. The return was sadder than ever I should have dreamed. In Berlin, where I had lived after my mother's death, a tricky nervous trouble had taken hold of me and kept

me confined to bed for many weeks. The doctors wrestled with death and saved my life, but the blooming young girl had become a pale weak shadow. My physician recommended the country and pine-needle baths, and so I was bundled on to the train and transported to my brother's estate.

I must have presented a pretty pitiful spectacle, because when I reached the house and was lifted out of the carriage, I saw tears in the old domestics' eyes.

It is a peculiar feeling to know you are back home again after long wanderings, especially if you have gone through as much trouble as I had. A rare softness takes hold of you, and you try to blot out forever the joy and the suffering imposed by an alien world. You try to be a child again and conjure up long lost magic out of the grave.

As I leaned back in my reclining chair and let my tired eyes roam over the familiar fields, one shade after another came alive again, and the first one in the motley throng was—my dear, flaxen-haired goose-herd.

"What has become of him?" I asked my brother, and was rejoiced by the good news that he had grown up into a fine, good-looking young man and could already fully take the place of his father, the smith.

I felt my heart throbbing. I tried to scold myself for my folly, but with poor success. The dear old memories were not to be dismissed, and finally I yielded myself up to them unrestrainedly and pictured the manner of our seeing each other again in all the glowing colours of fairy tale romance.

A few days after my arrival I was allowed to take my first drive. I was lifted into a carriage, driven to the woods, and then set down on a soft, mossy, peaceful little spot, which I had selected deliberately. From it you could see the smithy in which the companion of my childhood dwelt.

My brother wanted to stay with me, but I begged him not to let me keep him from his work, and assured him that the little girl sent along to wait on me was quite enough protection. Besides, what was there to be afraid of

in these peaceful home woods? So, the coachman drove my brother back to his office on the estate, and they were to call for me again in two hours. Then I dismissed the little girl, too, telling her to go hunt strawberries but to stay nearby. She ran off happily.

I was alone at last! Now I could dream to my heart's content. The fir trees rustled overhead, and from the smithy came the dull blows of the hammer. Brightly glowed the fire in the forge, and every now and then a dark figure glided in front of it. That must be he.

I did not tire following the movements of his arms. I admired his strength and trembled for him when the sparks flew about his body.

The two hours went by unnoticed, and in the midst of my dreamy meditations I was surprised by my brother coming to call for me.

"Well, did it seem a long time?" my brother asked gaily.

I shook my head, smiling, and tried to get up, but sank back wearily.

"Hm, hm," said my brother, reflecting. "I

didn't bring the coachman back, thinking I could carry you to the carriage by myself, but the seat is high, and I couldn't get you up without hurting you. See here, Grete,"—he turned to my little companion, who had come running at the sound of the carriage—"you go run down to the smith, the young one, you know, and tell him he should come and help me here."

He tossed a penny on the ground and the little maid, radiant with delight, picked it up before going for the smith.

I felt the blood rush to my cheeks. I was to see him again, here, on this spot. He was to act the Samaritan to me. I sat there waiting, my hand pressed to my pounding heart, until—until——

There he was coming! Yes, that was he! How strong, how handsome he had grown to be! Heavy flaxen hair about his smoke-blackened face, and a thick growth of light down around his powerful chin. Young Siegfried must have looked like that while serving his apprenticeship with the wicked Mime.

He clutched awkwardly at his little cap, tipped back on his neck so jauntily, while I held out my hand smiling and said, "How do you do?"

"Very well," he replied with an embarrassed laugh, and carefully wiped his grimy fingers on his leather apron before taking my hand.

"Help me lift the lady into the carriage," said my brother.

He wiped his hands again, and caught hold of me—none too gently—under the armpits, and the two of them, my brother taking me by my feet, lifted me up on to the carriage cushions.

"Thanks, thanks," I said and gave him a smile.

He stood at the carriage door, shyly twisting his cap and looking from one to the other of us uncertainly.

"He still has something on his heart," I said to myself. "Why not? At the sight of me old memories have been awakened. He wants to talk to me of the blissful days when in childish innocence we watched the geese together.

Ah, he doesn't trust himself—his lord's presence—I ought to come to his assistance a little."

"Well," I said, giving him a friendly, encouraging look straight in his eyes, "what are you thinking of?"

My brother at this turned from his horses, with which he had been busy, and said, thrusting his hand into his pocket:

"Oh, you're waiting for your tip."

I felt as though some one had struck me in the face.

"For goodness' sake, Max," I stammered, my blood going hot and cold.

But my brother did not hear me and handed him—actually dared to—a dime.

I was already seeing my childhood friend dashing the coin back in my brother's face. I exerted all my strength to raise myself and stretch my hands out so as to prevent violence—but what was that? No, impossible! And yet I saw it with my own eyes. He took the money—he said, "Thank you"—he bowed—he walked away!

And I? I stared after him as though he were an evil spirit, then sank back on the cushions with a weary sigh.

That, my dear friend, was the way I said good-bye to my youthful dream.